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ARIFURETA SHOKUGYOU DE SEKAISAIKYOU
世界最強
OVERLAP

Arifureta Shokugyou de Sekai Saikyou - Volume 04

Table of Contents

1. Chapter 1
2. Chapter 2
3. Chapter 3
4. Chapter 4
5. Chapter 5
6. Epilogue
7. Extra Chapter

Chapter 1

【Neutral Commerce City Fyuren】

The world's largest commercial city where all sorts of people gathered and interacted; it was filled with a grand vigor which would never change. Enclosing it in its entirety was a huge wall, but even with this, the clamor could be heard far in the distance.

A long line of tourists, merchants, and adventurers queued up outside, to the point the group could be considered a special product of 【Fyuren.】Hearing the noise from the city, people only grew more irritated as they awaited their turn.

At the tail end of the line awaiting inspection was a loose-looking man attended to by two flashy women, his dissatisfaction clear to see.

Frankly speaking, he would look halfway intelligent if he used any difficult words, and he had a thoughtless atmosphere about him, and as he complained about the incompetent executives of 【Fyuren】which made him wait for so long, the surrouning merchants bore the laughter within them, but the man and his women seemed not to notice.

And in the ears of the loose-looking man who was ignorant of the people laughing at him, a sound he was not accustomed to hearing, a shrill, faint noise, suddenly approached.

The man and the two women by his side initially ignored it, but with the merchants and others looking behind them with wide eyes, and with the noise gradually approaching, they looked back, saying 「What is it!」

Running down the highway followed by a storm of dust was a large black box they had ever seen before.

The people gradually grew noisy. Was it a demon? Though they tried to run, the speed of the object was far beyond their imagination; it reached them quickly.

The worthless man stiffened up. He, as well as the people around

him, had fear in their eyes.

A large black, box-shaped object spun as it nearly collided into the end of the line, kicking up a large cloud of dust.

People stared at the object — the magically driven four-wheeled vehicle, “Brise” — confused, thinking 「What on earth is that?」 when a door opened.

「This line is as long as usual.」 「… Mm. No helping it.」

The crowd shook as the ones to emerge, naturally, Hajime and Yue, were visible. Shea and Tio followed after, then Will Kudeta who had a cramp in his cheek.

Several days ago, Hajime took on a request from the head of the

Fyuren branch of the Adventurer Guild, Iruwa Chang, to investigate the 【Northern Mountain Range】to search for Will Kudeta. Hajime had managed to protect him from the dragon Tio, and they finally returned safely.

With the attention focused on them, despite being of the upper class, Will bowed in apology while saying 「I'm sorry for the disturbance!」But since he was not as eye catching, no one paid him attention immediately.

「Mm～」What caught their eyes was a beautiful woman and girls stretching themselves out. Their eyes were first on the unknown high-speed moving box, but as soon as Yue and the others appeared, sounds of admiration and sighs of enchantment were audible.

Hajime sat on the hood of Brise and looked at the gate in the distance. 「About an hour to go.」Like the girls, he stretched himself out in a leisurely manner, relieved he would not be in the car the entire time.

Because Brise was operated directly by magic, Hajime did not need to be at the wheel; he could move it with but a thought. Naturally, the operation became more difficult, but this way he could use the vehicle as a bench to relax.

Hajime cracked his neck, and, understanding the stiffness in his shoulders, Yue went behind him and began giving him a

massage. She seemed to know how to do it well. Hajime's cheeks

seemed to relax as he entrusted himself to her.

Seeing the two, Shea became lonely and drew close, her rabbit ears flopping about.

「Mu, allow me to join as well!」Tio frowned as she clung to Hajime's right arm, emphasizing her chest… only to be met with a slap. 「Ahan～」she collapsed while gasping. Though he had put in enough force to make her do a triple axle, she seemed happy at Hajime's feet… He was in no mind to reward this perverted dragon any further.

Shea smiled in embarrassment as she looked at Hajime whose mouth was twitching.

「Hajime-san. Was it a good idea to drive in this? I thought we were trying to stay hidden…」

「Hm? It's too late now, right? The information will spread within a week, and I was sure this day would come at some point in time…I guess I was a bit hasty in anticipation of this moment.」

「… There's no need for prudence.」

Hajime shrugged his shoulders as he answered Shea's question. Until now, he had put some effort into keeping them hidden, but the fight in【The Town of Ul】would spread quickly, so his efforts may have been for naught. Still, as Yue said, he could not hide showing his artifacts, so he may as well have gone without holding back.

「Hmm～ I see. Well, it's natural the Kingdom or the Church will take action. I hope Aiko-san and Iruwa-san can give us support…」

「Well, they're just insurance in the end. I expressed myself well, I think. I have the resolution to fight them. With that said, Shea. There's no reason for you to go around pretending to be a slave, right? You can get rid of that collar if you want.」

Iruwa and Aiko were to help prevent problems with the Church and the country. Since they were more of an afterthought, Hajime did not worry much.

He cut the talk short and told Shea she was free as he poked at her collar. It was a tacit statement saying she did not need to hold back, since they were not obviously avoiding troublesome things.

But Shea quietly stroked the collar and blushed as she shook her head.

「No, I will keep this. This is the first thing I got from Hajime-san…

It is proof that I am yours… I've come to like it lately… so I will keep it.」

Piko piko, Shea's rabbit ears moved about in embarrassment. She looked down, hiding her timid eyes. Shea's bashful appearance was incredibly cute. Many men held their nose to stop themselves from bleeding as they looked at her.

「… I see. Then let me make it a bit more beautiful.」「H, Hajime-san?」

When Hajime looked at her face and placed his hand on her cheek, she blushed more and more.

Hajime took out a beautiful crystal from “Treasure Warehouse” and used “Transmute” to install it on Shea’s collar.

When Hajime made Shea’s collar, she was initially to act like his slave, so he made it crudely. He put a random stone in and disregarded its design. Originally, it was something temporary to help them as they stayed in town.



But now, he was fond of Shea and it was such a crude object. Hajime's feelings toward Shea, which were now incredibly soft, were far beyond the boorish appearance of her collar, so he thought he would tailor it to suit her.

In the end, it had a pale blue geometrical design which attached to

a black cloth. The mysterious collar, with the God Crystal as its core, emitted a powder blue light… It was far more fashionable than anything found on sale. It no longer gave off the impression of a dog collar used to restrain her.

「Haa～ It's the first time I've worn such a beautiful accessory.」
Shea brushed her fingertips along the cross with a loose smile.
Let alone the Sea of Trees, Shea rarely left her own village, so her life was one without relation to jewelry such as this. Even so, Shea was an adolescent girl. She looked from afar at those of the same gender in【Felbergan】who wore accessories made of processed crystals found in the Sea of Trees and had emotions of envy more than just one or two times.

Naturally, getting a shining piece of jewelry for the first time, she was excited. Furthermore, it was presented to her by the person she had fallen for. Her rabbit ears were erect, expressing her pleasure.

「Thank you so much, Hajime-san!」

Hajime shrugged seeing Shea's happy expression while Yue patted him on the back. Tio, who had approached once again, was hit away.

The people who watched the pink atmosphere around Hajime as he was surrounded by extreme beauties were filled with various feelings.

The women were envious of the beautiful faces of the girls while the men were divided into those who were fascinated by the girls' appearance and those who were emitting murderous intent toward Hajime; there were also those who were interested in the artifacts and goods they held.

Still, no one faced Hajime directly. The merchants were restraining each other, all while waiting for a moment to speak

to him.

As for the loose- looking man, he was mortified when comparing the girls with the women he was with. He rashly walked toward Hajime.

「Hey girls. If you'd like, how about I —」

「What are you doing, trying to touch us without permission? Huh?」

The man called out to the girls while ignoring Hajime. If the man had simply spoken to them, Hajime would likely have just used "Overpower" and things would end there. However, the man tried to touch Shea.

The man himself had a good appearance. He thought any woman would fall for him, but Shea looked at him coldly; though the man was unperturbed by this, Hajime grabbed the man's face before anything could happen. Naturally, there was a thick blood thirst.

「Hii!?」

The man shrieked miserably. Hajime did not care about the man and threw him down the highway. The man slid along the ground for 30 meters, his face planted in the earth. He then bounced up and flew an additional 10 meters after which he stopped moving.

The rubble on the ground was heavy, and the man was no longer moving. The surrounding people watched dumbfounded having seen the man fly in an impossible orbit. They then looked at Hajime. The two women with the man also looked at Hajime

timidly and shuddered at his absolute zero gaze, screamed, and ran away.

A while ago, the merchants who were saying 「I won't let you have a go first」 and restraining one another were now saying 「Go on, he's yours.」 Hajime's mood was clear from his bearing.

With no one approaching him, Hajime looked about in satisfaction before calmly returning to his disinterest.

「Haa, Hajime-san was angry for me～ Do you want to monopolize me? I've gone yet another step forward!」

「… Shea, fight.」

「Yue-san～ Yes. I'll work hard～!」

「Yes, that is important～ Master, do you value me? Will you throw me like you did that man as well?」

Shea was happy that Hajime got angry when the playboy tried to touch her. In all actuality, even if Hajime had not done anything, Shea herself would have responded. Though he had no real desire to monopolize Shea, because she was important to him, he did not bother correcting her.

As an aside, Tio looked at the man who was tossed aside in envy. She sidled up to Hajime with expectations in her eyes and was met with a slap. 「Ahh!」 Tio cried out happily as she crumbled to the ground. Hajime looked at her angrily, but eventually gave up while saying 「She's really no good.」

Hajime and the others continued with their flirtatious attitude while Will, who had gone off on his own, sat on the ground with his hands around his knees. He looked up when he heard a noise rapidly approach them.

Hajime looked over. Apparently it was a guard that was running over. They may have seen his quarrel and moved to defend the man who had fallen on the ground.

A man on horseback approached with three men in simple armor and began questioning Hajime and the surrounding merchants. One of the merchants pointed at Hajime, then to the man on the ground. One of the guards issued instructions to look after the man on the ground, while he approached Hajime with one of the other guards. Their eyes were steep. It was not out of anger… but out of jealousy.

「Hey, you! What's with this commotion! And what's this black box? What's your explanation!」

Though he spoke to Hajime in an arrogant manner, his gaze had no strength as Yue and the others were facing him. Hajime answered without looking at the guards, since he expected

this to happen.

「This is my artifact. That man tried to put a hand on my companions, so I threw him down. Can you believe that? He tried to approach so suddenly, I was afraid and lashed out…

Guard, shouldn't you be taking care of that sex criminal? My companions and I came to Fyuren and this happened… And even if I was defending myself, it seems I'm being treated as an offender now…?」

Hajime quickly spoke a plausible answer. Though Shea was only clinging to Hajime, objectively speaking, she looked like she was clinging to him in fright.

How truly tragic! He had a look as if he were pleading, but Will, nearby, simply thought「He distorted the truth.」The surrounding merchants were quietly whispering「Rather than being clung to, he threw the man before he could even finish talking,」or「He wasn't afraid, rather, he was flirting and then he attacked the man.」

However, there was not much in terms of investigation, since the girls around Hajime were indeed beautiful women; rather, people just thought「How unfortunate.」

At that time, one of the guards looked at Hajime suspiciously, then said「Ah」and began whispering to another guard. They continued looking at Hajime, and eventually said「Now that you mention it…」

「… Are you Hajime, Yue, and Shea?」「Hm? Ah, that's right, but…」

「I see. In that case, you're returning from the branch head's request?」

「Yeah, that's right… is there a notification from him or something?」

The guard nodded and allowed them to pass. He drove in Brise followed by the guards. Behind them were contemptuous gazes as well as curious onlookers due to him entering ahead of everyone else. With that, they set foot in Fyuren once again.

They entered 【Fyuren】and were immediately guided to the drawing room in the adventurer guild.

Hajime passed through the reception room in the Adventurer Guild.

They were served high-level tea and waited for 5 minutes. The door was flung open and Iruwa Chang, the head of the branch who requested Hajime save Will, jumped through.

「Will! Are you okay!? Are you injured!?」

The calm atmosphere he had before was nowhere in sight. He confirmed Will's safety rather than greeting them. He must have been worried that much.

「Iruwa-san… I'm sorry. I asked you for such a huge favor, and so many things happened…」

「… What are you saying… I was the one that introduced you to a

dangerous request… you really are safe… I thought we lost you… Your parents were so worried, I'm sure they're just glad they can see your face again soon. It was reported a few days ago that you were rescued.」

「Father and Mama… I see. I'll go them immediately.」 Iruwa had already told Will's parents and arranged things so it

would be easier for them to be available.

Will expressed his gratitude to Iruwa who had others search, then made Hajime and the others promise to see him again so his family could pay their respects. Hajime was fine as things were, but Will was not satisfied with just a simple thank you.

Afterward, Will left and Iruwa looked at Hajime. Iruwa bowed deeply to Hajime with a smile.

「Hajime-kun. Really, thank you. I did not think you would be able to bring Will back alive. Even if I wish to express my gratitude, I can't.」

「Well, he was lucky to survive.」

「Fu fu, is that so? Though that might be the case… it's also true you defended him from tens of thousands of demons, right? "Sword of the Goddess?"」

While he radiantly laughed, Iruwa called Hajime by his nickname he earned from battling the crowd of demons. Apparently there was

a means of communication he had that was faster than Hajime's method of traveling.

「… That information came pretty early.」

「For guild executives, we have an artifact that allows long-distance communication. My subordinate went after you. Still, since you were moving unexpectedly quickly in the artifact, he couldn't keep up… This is the first time I've heard him complain as the best man for intelligence gathering.」

Iruwa smiled wryly. From his words, Hajime may have had some idea he would be tailed.

Was it upon Iruwa's instruction, or perhaps the subordinate's arbitrary decision, but when thinking of Iruwa's subordinate impatiently leaving town… only to arrive at the 【Town of Ul】 and immediately encounter tens of thousands of demons VS 4 people, then having to quickly return afterward, desperately riding his horse… he could not help but sympathize.

Whether the information was obtained through direct communication or via an artifact, Hajime did not particularly criticize Iruwa. Rather, he was slightly relieved to know Iruwa, who would be supporting him, was this prudent.

「Kohon,」 Iruwa cleared his throat, pushing aside his subordinate's anxiety, confusion, and mental fatigue.

「But really. To think there were signs of a large disaster in 【The

Northern Mountain Range.】It seems it was a good thing to request this of you for more than just the search. Though I'm interested in your ability to annihilate tens of thousands… will you actually tell me? What on earth did you do?」

「Ah, I don't care. But before that, I would like for Yue and Shea to have their Status Plates first… and Tio —」

「Ho… so you're preparing one for those two… Very well. Master, may I have one as well?

「… There you have it.」

「Certainly, seeing the Status Plates will likely lend credence to

your ability to repel such a large crowd… I understand.」 Iruwa, seeing Yue and Shea, as well as Tio who had just joined the

group, had vaguely guessed the "something," but he still changed expression when the staff member brought the three new Status Plates.

Their statuses were as follows.

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RES:	60
AGI:	120
MAG:	6980
MDEF:	7120
Skill:	**Automatic Regeneration** [＋Pain Control] **All**

Attribute Aptitude **Compound Magic** **Magic**

Manipulation [＋Magic Radiation] [＋Magic Compression] [＋Remote Control] [＋Efficiency Up] [＋Magic Absorption] **Image Composition** [＋Image Reinforcement Power Up] [＋Multiple Composition] [＋Delay Motion] **Blood Power Conversion** [＋Body Strengthening] [＋Magic Conversion] [＋Strength Conversion] [＋Magic Strengthening] [＋Blood Contract] **High Speed Magic Recovery** **Creation Magic**

Gravity Magic

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Class: Diviner

STR: 60 [+Max 6100]

VIT: 80 [+Max 6120]

RES: 60 [+Max 6100]

AGI: 100 [+Max 6125]

MAG: 3020

MDEF: 3180

Skill: **Premonition** [+Automatic Activation] [+Presumed Future] **Magic Manipulation** [+Body Strengthening] [+Partial Strengthening] [+Conversion Efficiency Up II] [+Focused Strengthening] **Gravity Magic**

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AGI:	580 [＋Dragon Form 3480]
MAG:	4590
MDEF:	4220
Skill:	**Dragon Form** [＋Dragon Scale Hardening] [＋Magic

Efficiency Up] [＋Physical Strength Up] [＋Roar II] [＋Wind Cloak] [＋Pain Conversion] □**Magic Manipulation** [＋Magic Radiation] [＋Magic Compression] □**Fire Attribute Aptitude** [＋Magic Consumption Down] [＋Effect Up] [＋Duration Up] □**Wind Attribute Aptitude** [＋Magic Consumption Down] [＋Effect Up] [＋Duration Up] □**Compound Magic**

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It was reasonable. Yue had “Blood Power Conversion” while Tio had “Dragon Form,” skills peculiar to races which had already fallen. Hundreds of years had passed, and they were races of legend, their fall proof that they were enemies of God.

Furthermore, even without the impact of Yue and Tio’s races, Shea had completely disregarded the common sensibilities of her race. He could not help but be surprised.

「No way… Though I thought there would be something here, to think it would be like this… 」

Iruwa sunk into a cold sweat while Hajime continued speaking without a care. Just from hearing his story, one would believe it was the greatest lie in his life, but Iruwa could not help but believe it seeing the values and skills on their Status Plates.

When Hajime finished speaking, Iruwa sat in the sofa, looking as if he had aged 10 years.

「… Since it was Catherine-sensei, naturally, I expected you to be one of those that came from another world… but to think that was just the tip of the iceberg… 」

「… So, Branch Head. What will you do? Will you report us to the Church as dangerous elements? 」

Iruwa looked at Hajime accusingly.

「That’s a joke, isn’t it? Is that even something I could possibly do?

As an executive of the Guild, I could not possibly make the decision to antagonize you… and don't make light of me. You are my benefactors. I won't forget that for the rest of my life.」

「… I see. That's good.」

Hajime shrugged and apologized with his gaze.

「I, I will support you as much as I can, as promised. As an executive of the Guild, I am but an individual. Still, you've shown your strength. For the time being, I don't think there will be anything complicated. For now, you can relax and know that I will support you. I will also change your adventurer rank to "Gold." Usually there's a lot of trouble to go through with this, but… you have the support of both Catherine-sensei and myself, and you are also the famed "Sword of the Goddess."」

It was a generous reception Iruwa was giving them while they remained in 【Fyuren;】they were allowed to use the VIP rooms of a hotel directly under guild management, and Iruwa had prepared a letter containing his family crest. Though this was also a sign of his gratitude, it was also a means of making a friendly relationship with Hajime.

「Well that's good. All the better. It was a good idea rushing to Ul then.」

「I'm glad you say that… but even if you hide your Status Plate, isn't it only a matter of time before your true colors come out to light? Honestly, even if I cover for you, it's like trying to defend against a Supreme Rank magic with a sheet of paper…」

Seeing Iruwa smile bitterly wihle scratching his cheek, Hajime shrugged his shoulders while bringing his cup to his mouth.

「It all depends on how you use that sheet of paper, right? My class is that of a Transmuter. Anything that isn't deemed usable, I need to be able to use it. With that said, allow me to use that support and goodwill of yours.」

「Is that so?」

「Yeah. Also, I said it when you requested I do the search, right?」

「?」

Seeing Iruwa tilt his head, Hajime smiled fearlessly. 「From the start, I was prepared.」

「I see. That's what you meant.」

Whether Iruwa was there or not, that did not matter. If he was there, he would be useful, but even if he was not, Hajime

would not stop walking. With a glare and a fearless smile which exposed his fangs, he would crush all obstacles.

Hearing his determination, approaching him, the girls showed no sign of anxiety or worry; Iruwa could not help but smile. He felt exalted for no reason. He felt his passion return from when he was a youth, aiming to be an executive staff member.

He could feel it. That this man would become an enemy to the Saint Church and change the world.

He was not dissatisfied with the current state. Iruwa was certainly a success amongst the people in this world. Rather, it would be more reasonable for Iruwa not to want change.

But still, with both trepidation and and excitement, the man named Iruwa Chang felt a euphoria he could not deny, because he was an executive of the Adventurer Guild.

「… I pray that your journey become a troublesome and wonderful adventure.」

「… Those words, I hesitate to say thanks.」

Even if Iruwa was giving him his best words, it was quite a delicate thing for Hajime. However, he could not help but smile wryly seeing this executive of the Adventurer Guild with his desires leaking out. The girls as well looked delicately at each other.

Seeing this group, Iruwa, who would be more busy than he had been over the last few years, smiled cheerfully.

Afterward, they separated from Iruwa and left the VIP room, heading over to the hotel managed by the Guild in 【Fyuren.】 It was a twenty story building, and they were stationed at the top floor. They were able to see the Sightseeing Ward from the window. It was a splendid room with four wide private rooms, completely equipped with a canopy bed. Thes ofa and carpet were both soft, easily understood to be first class goods.

Hajime's body sunk into the sofa, and Yue drew close to his side; Shea and Tio were busy curiously exploring the room. Earl Grale Kudeta and Saria Kudeta, Will's parents, came to greet the four. Unlike the aristocrats Hajime had met in the palace before, this family was down to earth. Meeting his parents,

Hajime could understand Will's own personality.

Earl Kudeta frequently invited them to his house as well as offered money and goods in payment, but Hajime,

「It is good your son is safe. What I received from the Guild is reward enough. I received a request and completed it. That's all there is to it.」

He had taken an admirable attitude. 「Medic, Medic!」 Shea screamed. Tio slipped and fell as if seeing something frightening. 「Master has lost his mind!1 He lost his mind!」 she shouted, making the Kudeta parents look in surprise.

「Excuse me for the rudeness,」 Hajime apologized to the couple then gently said 「Go play outside」 as he approached Shea and Tio and threw them outside the window. From the 20th floor.

「Aahhhhhhhh～～～」 their screams could be heard. Though the Kudetas were pale, Hajime closed the window, saying, 「Those two really are energetic, aren't they?」 The Kudeta family nodded quickly.

Hajime thought using a high-handed attitude would and maintaining an insolent attitude would give the two a bad impression, so he thought to put on an act and be a little proper, but… it was a little too much for Shea and Tio.

With some amazement in her expression, Yue called out 「I'll check up on them」 and jumped out the window. The Kudeta parents turned like unoiled machines toward Will.

Their won was rubbing the goosebumps on his arm, turning his eyes to Hajime. He had somehow understood. He understood both Hajime's admirable manners as well as this development.

「Well, I suppose the Earl has his own feelings.」 「Eh? Ah, yes…」

Earl Kudeta was constantly confused by the abnormal situations appearing one after another and looked back from his son to Hajime. Seeing Earl Kudeta's gaze, Hajime spoke radiantly, making similar demands that he had made to Iruwa.

「It will be enough if you help at your convenience when we are

in need of it.」

「R, right? Well, you did risk your life to protect my son from a dragon's breath… Right, your companions—」

「How modest… So I might be able to ask for help if I am in the midst of some troubles? Thinking about it, this seems a bit more excessive as a reward?」

「Ha ha ha, that may be so. Though I cannot make an absolute promise, I will help as much as I can. That is enough of this bit of opera, throwing your two female companions out the window—」

「Thank you very much, Earl. These words are enough.」 Hajime casually ignored the earl's question. Since he had acted

too naturally, the Kudeta family could not keep up. However, with their conversation complete, they began to think. 「Hey, didn't we just witness a murder? Definitely, right? We'll see it when we leave the hotel, right!?」 As they began sweating,

「Uu～ That was terrible, Hajime-san. Though we won't die, falling from that height is scary.」

「R, really. Suddenly throwing us away. It was my first time like that, Master. My heart throbbed a little.」

「… Silence, pervert.」

Fair hands gripped the windowsill as Shea and Tio crawled through, their bangs hanging down like an old willow tree. Though Yue was floating using Gravity Magic, no one paid her mind as the sight of Shea and Tio crawling up was simply too eerie.

「Hii,」 the Kudeta family screamed and fell back. 「Mama!」 Will screamed as he supported her. As expected of a person with such a strong Oedipus Complex that he would carry a picture of his mother

from her youth with him. His reaction was faster than her husband, Earl Kudeta.

「Rather, Hajime- san. What's with that disgusting manner of talking… I still have goosebumps.」

「Right, Master. Even I will worry if you are like that.」

Though he had kept himself in check and spoke politely, he could

not help but float a vein on his forehead thanks to the shameless rabbit and perverted dragon.

Earl Kudeta looked with wide eyes as he called out in surprise. 「Y, you two, you're safe!!」

Dopan dopan! Two gunshots roared. 「Abe!」 「Thank you very much!」 one screamed while the other thanked him as Shea and Tio disappeared on the other side of the window once again.

「I apologize for my companions.」

「… No, this was unexpected. I will also return today, my wife seems to be exhausted.」

Earl Kudeta was sweating like a waterfall, using his wife as an excuse to leave. Will, seeing his father, smiled bitterly and thought 「Can't be helped.」 He looked at Hajime and thanked him once again before leaving.

Hajime called out to Earl Kudeta who had turned around, tense as if he was being stared at by a fierce animal, and quietly called to him.

「Thank you for coming out of your way to visit. As for the reward… I am expecting much of it.」

「Of, of course…」

Earl Kudeta had no dignity as he left the room. In the end, Will bowed once again and closed the door.

Hajime smiled; he intended to obtain a convenient hand of an earl's support by creating a good impression, but now they were the poor victim by all means, clearly threatened.

「I can't figure it out. Why did this happen…」

「… Isn't it a natural consequence of your actions?」 The response from his lover was incredibly biting.

After the Kudeta family returned, Hajime laid down on the sofa to relax, letting loose a deep sigh.

Yue sat down and shifted Hajime's head to rest on her lap as usual. Shea sat at his feet. Tio continued exploring the room. She admired the furniture. She was marveling at the difference between older times and the current age.

「Let's rest for today. We'll go shopping tomorrow.」

Hajime, feeling Yue's hand as she smoothed out his hair with a pleasant smile, made the schedule for tomorrow. Shea moved at that time. She reached over toward Hajime's lying body and timidly shook him.

「Um～ Hajime-san, your promise…」

「… That's right. I was going to go around the Sightseeing Ward with you.」

In the car on the way back from 【the Town of Ul,】 in order to repay Hajime for saving Aiko's life, Hajime promised to go around the Sightseeing Ward with her once they reached 【Fyuren】 for putting her body on the line to save Aiko.

Hajime looked at Shea who gazed at him in expectation. Though Hajime hesitated because it was necessary to purchase goods too, Yue severed his hesitation. She put her soft hands on his cheeks.

「… Leave the shopping to Tio and me. Take Shea with you.」「… You're fine with that?」

「Mm… In exchange…」「In exchange?」

Yue gently urged Hajime to fulfill his promise with Shea from the bottom of her heart; she was more like an older sister than a simple friend. Hajime had a complicated expression. Yue's face became more dazed as she licked her lips. She brought her face close to his and whispered in his ears…

「… I'll love you lots tonight.」

While saying this, she covered his face with her hand; he could only respond with an affirmative. Hajime was confident, even if he could win against the creatures in the depths of the Labyrinths, he would never, in his life, win against Yue.

「… Before you notice, those two naturally enter their own world…」

「True, but Shea, you are not discouraged in the least. Well, I am just fine as long as Master bullies me… how difficult, Shea~」 Tio looked in interest at Shea who was looking at Yue with respect

while saying 「She's really amazing 」and the relationship between the two who felt no envy for one another. Afterward, Hajime, whose reason had disappeared from Yue's surprise attack, regained his thoughts, and the four chatted deep into the night.

Deep in the night.

With the moon approaching its apex… in a hotel operated by the Adventurer Guild, a shadow stealthily moved to the terrace of the top floor. Two people dressed in black like assassins quietly approached the window of a certain room, removing all signs, quietly looking inside.

What they saw in the room…

「Fuwa! You can see it, right, Tio-san! Such an intense… Yue-san,

she'll break!」

「Fuoooo! Master is so excited! B, but Shea. Look at Yue's expression… not good, even as a woman, I have strange feelings…」

「Hauuu, that expression as if she's melting! She looks so happy~ I'm so jealous~」

「Muu~ Though I am satisfied with being bullied a little bit…

something like that would not be bad~」

- After this, Hajime noticed their presence, and, needless to say, gave an appropriate punishment to these peeping toms.

「Fun fun fu fun~ Fun fu fun~! This is great weather~ It's perfect for a date~」

Shea walked down the streets of 【Fyuren,】almost at a skip, her rabbit ears dancing about cheerfully.

Unlike the typical adventurer garbs she wore, she had on a cute milky-white dress. With the breasts more exposed, every time she walked, her rich chest shook! Purun! She also wore a thin black belt at her waist which accentuated her beautiful figure.

It emphasized the charming curves and her rich waist. Her lines curved further down, her long legs extending from her 15

centimeter skirt, drawing the gaze of men.

Her atmosphere and smile were more attractive than anything else. She had a slight blush and was very happy. Her feelings overflowed from her entire body. As a Demi-human, many would have simply looked at her collar and ignored her; however, the people gazing were either looking at her in rapture or looked at the two warmly.

Hajime walked behind her while smiling bitterly.

Hajime's face naturally became loose as he watched Shea quickly skip ahead then turn around and smile as she waited for him.

「You're frolicking too much, Shea. If you don't pay attention of what's ahead of you, won't you fall down?」

「Fu fu fu, I won't～ I was trained by Yue-san, right… !?」

As expected, Shea, who turned about, snagged her foot and fell down. Hajime quickly grabbed at her waist and supported her. Though Shea, with her physical strength, would quickly recover, she was paying particular attention of her surroundings due to her short skirt.

「Sh, showwy.」

「Look. I know you're happy, but be careful.」

Shea ducked her body in embarrassment from being held by her waist. As they walked. She demurely tugged at Hajime's clothes and walked slowly next to him. This appearance seemed to knock out all the men around them. A few were actually hit by their lovers.

The glances of the surroundings were focused on the two when they finally reached the Sightseeing Ward.

There were a number of amusement facilities here. There was a theater, museum, circus, music hall, aquarium, arena, game studio, observatory, a flower garden with a large maze, and a variety of beautiful buildings.

「Hajime-san, Hajime-san! Let's go to Meerstraat first! I've never seen sea creatures!」

With guidebook in hand, Shea shouted 「Hurry! Hurry!」 her rabbit ears moving about. Having lived in 【Hartsenna Sea of Trees,】 she had not seen anything from the sea, so she wanted to visit the famous aquarium in 【Fyuren,】 Meerstraat.

Though she was used to seeing freshwater fish because there were many lakes and rivers in the Sea of Trees, she thought the fish from the sea would be different. Though Hajime thought they were essentially the same… he could read the air and said nothing. His goal was to be nice to Shea.

「Hmmm~ Though they're on the mainland… they're fine. The maintenance must be a pain, especially with transportation…」

Hajime had no reason to refuse going with her so he decided to get interested as well. Shea grasped Hajime's hand and led him about happily.

As they traveled down the street, they saw acrobats challenging the

limits of what humans could feasibly due. Finally, they reached Meerstraat. It was a large blue building which made one think of the ocean, and it was filled with people.

Inside, it looked like an aquarium on Hajime's home world; however, there was no technology to make clear water tanks that could endure the large amounts of water pressure, so the thick glass was buried beneath metallic lattices.

Shea did not mind; her eyes were filled with a twinkle as she saw sea creatures for the first time in her life.

Beside her were families with young girls with the same expression. The little girl's father looked at Shea with an odd warmness, which irritated Hajime for some reason. He took her hand and left.

Though Shea was surprised by his actions, she was happy that he held her hands.

They had enjoyed their time in the aquarium for an hour when they reached a certain water tank they had seen before. Shea stared into it again.

In there … she saw something odd. It was a SeOman with a human face and the lower body of a fish; Hajime knew it from his experience as a gamer.

「… Wh, why is this here…」

Shea backed away with a tremble. The SeamOn had noticed Shea from inside the tank and gazed at her with a languid expression. Ignoring their tension, it looked at the two on the other side of the tank.

「What, what… it can, talk?」

According to the description, this SeamOn was a demon of the water system which could utilize a unique magic, “Telepathy.” It was famous as a demon which could communicate.

However, it was terribly lazy and rarely tried to speak, so even if it could talk, it had no motivation to respond, and, perhaps because it was so indifferent (?) to its human counterparts, people, it needed much attention.

Also, it loved alcohol and would become talkative when drinking. However, because the words flowed only in one direction, there was never a conversation… By the way, its name was Reaman.

Hajime ignored Shea who was staring at the creature for some unknown reason. Because he rarely received such a gaze, he used “Telepathy.”

『You can use Telepathy? Can you really speak? Can you understand my words?』

Reaman’s eyes reacted instantly. It looked away from Shea and returned Hajime’s gaze.

『… Tch, this is our first meeting. First of all, introduce yourself. There's a proper courtesy, you know. Young people these days…』

It apparently spoke like an old man. Hajime tried to converse once again.

『… My bad. I'm Hajime. So you really can communicate. What on earth is Reaman supposed to be?』

『… What is a Human? Can you answer that question? Of course

not. Well, if I were to say it, that was just a name I was given.』 Hajime thought 「He's blunt…」 It spoke with common sense and

was apparently a little cool. This was completely unexpected for him. It had some motivation to speak, too. He wanted to complain to the aquarium staff about their description.

Hajime, while looking to the distance in escapism, had a question asked of him by Reaman.

『Let me ask you something. Why can you use "Telepathy?" And a Human practicing this magic… It's exactly the same as mine.』

That was a natural question. After all, someone was using "Telepathy," a unique magic. Reaman, who rarely spoke, was conversing with Hajime.

Hajime explained how he plundered "Telepathy" from a demon

who could use it.

『… Looks like you've had a hard time. Thanks for telling it to this old man.』

It sympathized with him. Apparently it was a weak demon which was constantly chased. Seeing Hajime in his good clothing, he commented, 「You worked hard!」 and looked as if he were crying.

Hajime did not particularly correct him, since he did have a hard time. However, to have his life sympathized with by a fish… He felt a little worthless.

He calmed himself down and asked Reaman a variety of questions. For instance, whether or not demons had clear intentions, how they were born, and if there were other demons that could communicate.

Reaman told him most demons did not have a clear intent. As for communication, they could do that, but it was something known only to their race. It did not know how demons were born, however.

As they spoke, an appropriate amount of time passed. Seeing the fish demon and a young man face each other for such a long time, they began to attract public attention.

「Uu, Hajime-san. Everyone's looking. Why is it that when we're

on a date, you're looking old-man demon. Isn't that rude to me?」

Shea's rabbit ears were folded and she pulled at the hem of her skirt somewhat restlessly and bashfully, so Hajime reluctantly brought the conversation to an end. Seeing Hajime being so reluctant, Shea's rabbit ears seemed more and more wilted.

Hajime was interested in the conversation and wanted to talk more if possible, but… he had decided to focus on Shea today, so he did not want to be neglectful.

Reaman said, 「Whoa, sorry for obstructing your date」and ended the conversation there. He was the type of person who could read the air (though he was actually a fish demon with a human face.)

By the way, by the end of their conversation, they were calling each other 「Re-san」and 「Ha-bou」.

In the end, Hajime asked why Reaman was here. The answer returned to him was…

『Hm? Well, I was moving about as I pleased… when the earth suddenly seemed to dip … I swam underground for a bit… and found myself beneath a fountain in the grass. I would die without water. Using "Telepathy," I asked for help… well, that was how I was brought here.』

Hajime shed a little sweat. Clearly he was talking about when they

had cleared 【Raisen Great Labyrinth.】

Reaman was involved and was launched out. There was no doubt about it.

Hajime coughed, calmed himself down, and asked Reaman another question.

『Ah, Re-san. Do you want to leave here?』

『? Well, yeah. Still, traveling freely doesn't suit me. I should be born naturally and die naturally. Rather than in this cage, I would rather die in the ocean.』

Hajime, who already took a liking to Reaman, decided he would help.

『Re-san. If you want, I can bring you to a nearby river. Apparently

you were brought here due to being involved with our own problems.』

『Ha-bou… Heh, to think a boy like you would do this for me… but it would be poor form if I couldn't trust someone willing to help me out like this. I'll believe in you and wait here, Ha-bou.』

Hajime and Reaman exchanged smiles and made promises as men.

Shea, understanding their expression, said 「Eh? It can't be, a rival?」

Shea turned about and began to pull on Hajime's hand. Though she did not understand what was going on, Reaman's "Telepathy" temporarily reached Shea.

『Jou-chan, my bad, that was a surprise. You've been holding onto Ha-bou's hand like you won't let go.』

「Eh? Eh? Um, don't worry about it! Hajime-san took my first kiss! I won't let go!」

Though she did not understand what was going on, Shea responded firmly. Reaman smiled in satisfaction while Hajime smiled bitterly. The two left Meerstraat, praying for the future of his new friend.

After a few minutes, a flying cross attacked the base of Reaman's water tank, crushing it. Reaman splendidly swam out and knocked about the staff who chased after him (no one was injured.)

In addition, it was speculated that whatever destroyed the base of his tank was a new kind of demon or a new ability Reaman had been concealing… but that is a trivial story.

At this time…

Yue and Tio were walking through the Commercial Ward. But since the large quantities of food they needed were with Hajime in the “Treasure Warehouse,” they did not need much else for their travels. Simply put, they did not think about it

much and talked as they visited the various shops in the Commercial Ward.

「Right. Yue, was that really okay?」「…? You mean Shea?」

「Yes. Things can progress in a variety of ways, no? What do you think about that?」

Tio asked Yue who was looking at some exhibits in a clothing shop. She had some interest in her voice. 「Will she hit me? Or maybe trip me?」

Regardless, Tio was a newcomer who had just joined the group, and she was interested in the mysterious relation between the three. As she would travel with them from now on, she wanted to speak in an unreserved manner.

On the other hand, Yue did not show signs of agitation. She seemed to hold no sense of crisis.

「… If so, I will be happy.」

「You're fine with it? You're fine with the man you fell in love with being intimate with other women?」

「… Not other women. It's because it's Shea.」

Yue continued speaking as they looked at the shops.

「… At first, when she stuck to Hajime… I was annoyed because she was completely open about her desires… But I understood something about that girl.」

「Understood?」

「… Yes. She always tries her hardest. She does her best. For better or for worse, she does that for those she likes.」

「I see. I think I understand… So you want your bonds to be stronger?」

Tio, despite knowing Shea for a short time, felt like she could relax around her. Shea always seemed to smile, and she was the mood maker of the group.

Because she was young, she was shameless at times. Tio as well liked Shea. However, she felt the reasoning weak; after all, she could not simply accept that and inquired further.

「… That's half.」

「Half? What is the other half?」

For the first time, Yue smiled, responding to Tio's curiosity. 「… I like Shea. As much as Hajime. Even if the meaning is

different, the amount is the same… maybe because she's cute? 」

「… I see… toward both Master and you… her good will towards you two has no impurity. It is her natural virtue. Though I understand both your desires… to think even Master would be moved? It must be that girl's charm, right? 」

Yue shrugged her shoulders. She narrowed her eyes and blushed while licking her lips.

Despite her diminutive body, an amorous atmosphere flowed from her entirety; those who walked nearby naturally stopped walking, both men and women, colliding into other pedestrians who were similarly staring at Yue. Even Tio, whose plump body always exuded a sultry atmosphere, grew fascinated as she recalled Yue's expression the night before when she peeped on her and Hajime.

Yue spoke while unconsciously (or perhaps consciously) producing many man-made disasters in other places.

「… I want her to be more "important" to Hajime. However… only I am "special"… If you think you can take that position from me, you need only try. No matter who, no matter when… I will take the top. 」

"Can you do it?" Yue made that declaration with a smile.

Tio also retreated, seeing this gap from her typical expressionless face.

Surprised by this, she raised her arms in surrender and smiled bitterly.

「Well… I had no mind in starting a quarrel. I am happy if Master can abuse me for even 10 minutes.」

「… Pervert.」

Yue looked at Tio who was cheerfully laughing with an amazed expression.

Yue had said everything because she understood Tio's intent was

simply to build a better relation with them. Though the dragon girl let out a profound sigh of yearning, she simply smiled bitterly and stopped.

Immediately after the two had gotten closer, a strange sound was heard from a short distance away.

「Guhee!!」「Pugyaa!!」

The wall of a nearby building was destroyed as two men rolled out screaming. Sharp metal fragments pierced the ground near one man's face. He did not even move, completely like a corpse.

Furthermore, several men were blown away like pin balls through the glass window as they cried in agony. Sublime destruction met the building as its walls cracked.

Many convulsing men lined the street, their arms and legs bent in odd directions. Unable to endure the damage, the building eventually collapsed.

While the curious onlookers screamed and took distance, Yue and Tio, familiar with such destruction, watched as they heard an amazed voice.

「Ahh, so it was you two…」

「Eh? Yue-san, Tio-san? Why are you here?」

「… That's our line… This is a bit extreme for a date.」



「As expected～ So? Master, what trouble did you get involved in this time?」

As Yue and Tio expected, it was Hajime and Shea who appeared from the rubble.

The two had been on a date and now had their familiar weapons as they approached Yue and Tio. Though she wore cute clothing, Shea holding a brutal looking hammer over her shoulder was surreal.

「A ha ha, this really isn't like a normal date… Well, what happened is… we got involved with a human trafficking organization and decided to crush it… 」

「… You're fighting with a hidden organization? 」

Shea laughed dryly, stared at by Yue who was amazed. Tio turned to Hajime and requested a briefing.

「Well, we're a bit short on people. Rather than a simple explanation, mind helping? 」

While holstering Donner, Hajime threw the men on the ground aside as if they were simply stones obstructing traffic. While piling up the men, he began explaining things to Yue and Tio.

After leaving Meerstraat and eating lunch, Hajime and Shea were strolling along the flower maze. In Shea's arms were many food packages they bought at stalls. They were now eating some vanilla ice cream-like food.

「You don't often eat this much… is it really that good? 」

「Hamu… Yes, it's very delicious. Fyuren… really has nothing but high-level shops. 」

「… Don't eat too much, you'll get fat. 」

「… Hajime-san, that's not something you say to a girl. 」

The moment Hajime said that, she stopped eating, saying 「I'll exercise more later… and I'll limit myself tomorrow… 」, regardless, they were all excuses. Hajime smiled bitterly as he walked by Shea; suddenly, he looked down at his feet suspiciously.

Shea, noticing it, tilted her head and looked at Hajime curiously.

「What's wrong, Hajime-san?」

「Hm? No, I thought I noticed someone, but…」「Did you use Physical Perception?」

「I'm always working on the foundations.」

「Yeah? Well, isn't that a bit worrisome? Even if you say it's the sign of a person…」



Shea looked around her surroundings doubtfully. 「No, that's not it… I can feel it below us.」

「Below…? In the sewers? Um, then maybe it's staff maintaining

the facilities?」

「If that were the case, I wouldn't be so worried. How should I say it, the sign is small and weak… Like a child? And it's really weak, too.」

「!? Is, isn't that serious!? Someone may have fallen into a hole or gotten thrown in. Hajime-san! Let's go after it! Where is it?」

Hearing Hajime's words, Shea began running.

Though Aiko said his was a "lonely way of life," the fact that Shea moved before he could even think to made Hajime smile bitterly. Still, Shea's bright, straightforward personality was a good influence for him.

Hajime chased after the sign that flowed underground at a moderate speed. Given the structure of the town, he expected the drainage would flow along the street they were on now; after passing the source of the sign, he placed his hand on the ground and used Transmute. With bright crimson sparks, a hole appeared beneath him.

Hajime and Shea jumped down the hole, which was filled with a foul-smelling drainage. He held Shea and jumped with "Air Walk" to land on the ground on either side of the waterway.

「Hajime-san! I can also feel it. I'll jump in, so pull me up!」「No,

it's fine.」

Hajime grabbed Shea by the root of her neck as she prepared herself to jump into the drain, not worrying about the clothes she had prepared for the date getting dirty, and placed his

hand on the ground to use Transmute.

Following a trail of bright crimson sparks was a lattice which the child, who was heading toward them, got caught on. Using one of the features of his arm, Hajime extended his arm and grasped the child.

「This girl is…」

「She's breathing … Let's leave here first. The smell is terrible.」 Shea opened her eyes wide. Hajime, seeing her figure, was also surprised; however, this was not a sanitary place, nor was it

good for their mental or physical health.

Because they could not help but think about the child, Hajime had created a hole in the middle of the street, but worried about leaving it, he used Transmute on the earth to close it. He then opened a path while thinking about the buildings above ground. He covered her in a blanket he took out from "Treasure Warehouse" and held the child.

Crimson sparks flew about in a back alley, followed by a hole appearing in the ground. Hajime and Shea climbed out, holding the

young child. Hajime closed the hole and looked at the child he held in his arms.

The child had long emerald green hair and was clearly a young cute girl despite the dirty; from the looks of it, she was about 3 or 4 years old.

The features which stood out most, which confused Hajime and Shea, were her ears. They were fan-shaped rather than the typical shape belonging to a human. In the web spaces between her fingers, reflecting a color like autumn leaves, was a thin film.

「This girl… is from the Sea Clan… why is she here…」「Well, it can't be an honest reason.」

The Sea Clan was a Demi-human race which was considered special.

To the west of the continent, beyond 【Guryuen Desert】was a sea. Off shore was 【Marine City Erisen】where they lived. 80% of the marine products, which they collected using their

peculiar characteristics, were sent off and sold in the markets. In general, it was a race protected by the Kingdom despite being Demi-human. Since they could be used, they were heavily guarded.

A sea clansman, who should be protected, would not be flowing in the sewers unless there was crime involved.

Hajime and Shea looked at each other, not sure of what to say, when the small cute nose of the little Sea Clan girl began twitching. Next, her eyes opened suddenly.

At first, the little girl's gaze swam about in confusion, then they grew wide as they locked onto Hajime. She silently and earnestly stared at him.

Hajime also stared back without averting his gaze. They continued staring at each other. Still they continued staring at each other.

「What on earth are you two doing…」

Shea approached in amazement, ignoring the odd tension, when the little sea clan girl's stomach made a cute Guu~ sound. Her nose twitched once again, her gaze finally moving away from Hajime to lock on to the parcel Shea had in hand.

Shea tilted her head then unwrapped a kabob. She moved it back and forth, the girl's eyes following it like a magnet. Apparently she was hungry. Shea took the rest of the food from the package while Hajime began to transmute and spoke to the girl.

「So? What's your name?」

The girl, her eyes deprived of her by the kabobs in Shea's hand, suddenly noticed the bright crimson sparks coming from the ground. She crouched in surprise when she saw a square box rise up. After hearing Hajime, she looked about before quietly whispering her name.

「… Myuu.」

「I see. I'm Hajime. This is Shea. So you're Myuu. If you want to eat

the kabob, you should first wash the dirt off your body.」

Hajime took out clean water from “Treasure Warehouse” and placed it in the box, making a simple bathtub. He also adjusted

the water temperature with a Fulham Ore. It would be dangerous to eat with her body covered in sewage. He needed to give her some medicine (a commercial product) which would kill the bacteria which she may have drunk.

Though Myuu said nothing in response, she took off her clothes and got in the bathtub. 「Hiu!」her body contracted in fright, but her eyes gradually relaxed as warmth enveloped her body.

Hajime passed the towel, soap, and medicine to Shea to let her take care of Myuu while he went out to purchase clothes for her.

After a while, Hajime returned to the alley with her clothes. By that time, Myuu had already left the bath and was being held by Shea, going 「Ah～」as she took small bites from the kabob. Her hair was a little dirty before, but it now had its original emerald-green sheen, reflecting the light like a halo.

[image]

「Ah, Hajime-san. Welcome back. Though limited, it was enough for Myuu-chan.」

Shea spoke to Hajime when she noticed he returned. She was still patting Myuu’s hair dry. Myuu noticed Hajime’s existence and began staring at him again while eating. She was judging whether or not he was a good or bad person, most likely.

Hajime, while nodding to Shea, took out the clothes he bought for

Myuu. He had brought a milk-white feminine dress which matched Shea's clothes. He also bought gladiator-style sandals and underwear. Needless to say, when he was buying underwear for a child, the clerk looked at him anxiously.

Hajime, after compromising with Myuu, managed to get her to quickly put her top and underwear on after leaving the blanket. He knelt in front of her, putting her shoes on one by one.

He then pulled out an artifact from "Treasure Warehouse" which blew warm air; in other words, a dryer. Myuu's eyes, which were staring at Hajime before, gradually narrowed in the pleasant feeling from the warm air.

「… How should I say this, seeing you do all this, Hajime-san, it's unexpected…」

「What, that's abrupt…」

While drying Myuu's hair, Hajime frowned hearing Shea's words. Only his expression showed that, though. Shea smiled, causing Hajime to become embarrassed.

「So, from now on…」

「What will we do with Myuu -chan…」 Myuu looked at the two with an upward gaze.

Hajime and Shea decided to hear Myuu's circumstances. Though hesitantly, she spoke of what happened to her. It was

close to Hajime's expectations. One day, she got lost while swimming with her mother near the coast; when she was wandering, she was captured by a human.

Myuu was brought to 【Fyuren,】a long distance away, over many

days.

She was placed in a dim prison alongside many other Human children. Every day, children were taken out of the prison, never to return. Seemingly, they were auctioned off.

Finally, Myuu managed to escape into the drainage facilities which were being maintained when she happened to notice a hole leading to it. Myuu heard the nostalgic sound of water from it and jumped in.

Even if she was only 3 or 4 years old, she endured the sewage and swam as hard as she could. Even if she was young, she was still of the Sea Clan; it was impossible for a normal person to catch up to her.

However, unaccustomed to such a long journey, topped with the strain from being kidnapped and the food she had never tasted before, she was soaked in the sewage and lost her strength, both physically and mentally.

When she came to, she was warmly wrapped in Hajime's arms.
「The guests set the price… so an auction. It must be a hidden

auction if they're selling humans and a sea girl.」「… Hajime-san, what will you do?」

Shea tightly hugged Myuu. The light in her eyes showed she wanted to stay with the girl. Demi-humans had always been captured and sold as slaves. The fear and pain they experienced from being taken away from family was something Shea understood.

But Hajime shook his head.

「It's best we entrust her to security.」

「No… Will you desert all these children…」

Shea hugged Myuu more tightly in her shock and looked at Hajime.

Security was equivalent to the police organization back on Earth. Entrusting Myuu there meant cleaning his hands of her affairs. Though it was a proper way to handle missing children, Shea did not want this.

Hajime explained his reasoning to Shea as well as he could. 「You know, Shea, sending a stray child to security is natural.

Furthermore, Myuu is from the Sea Clan. They will protect her properly without fail. It would be a large problem if there were more sea clansmen at the auction, so they will start a formal investigation and protect the children they find.」

Even if the kidnapped was a child of the Sea Clan which was protected by 【Hairihi Kingdom,】 the neutral commerce city itself would not turn a blind eye to this. The administration would have the organization for public peace moved. In that case, Myuu would certainly be sent back to her home town.

Seeing Shea still being dissatisfied, Hajime spoke further.

「Listen, okay? This is the dark side of a large city. In short, this is a problem for 【Fyuren】… I understand your feelings about this, but there's not much else we can do…」

「B, but… right… we can take her, right? To the sea to the west…」「Haa～ Listen, weren't we going to a volcano before that?

Naturally, that would mean bringing her into the Labyrinth with us, right? Or will you stay in a shelter in the desert alone and look after her? And while we managed to get her away from whoever her kidnappers were, we might be doing the same thing. We can't do anything unreasonable.」

「… Uu, yes…」

Apparently, a considerable amount of affection had formed between Shea and Myuu in a short period of time. Perhaps understanding the mood, Myuu clung to Shea's body. Shea naturally allowed this to happen. Again, there was going to be resistance to their parting.

However, because what Hajime said was natural, Shea nodded. Hajime knelt down and matched Myuu's gaze, speaking slowly so she could understand.

「Listen, Myuu. We will take you to people who will defend you. It will take some time, but you will be able to return home.」

「… What about Onii-chan and Onee-chan?」 Myuu spoke to Hajime with an uneasy voice.

「Sorry, but we'll be leaving.」「No!」

「No, that's not…」

「Onii-chan, Onee-chan, you're fine! You two!」

Hajime flinched from her strong rejection; Myuu began struggling on Shea's knee like a spoiled child.

Though he thought she was acting like an adult until now, perhaps due to Hajime and Shea being meeker than normal, she unexpectedly demonstrated her side as a spoiled girl, especially since she trusted them. She may have been quite a happy child originally.

Though she trusted Hajime, it was necessary for him to inform the authorities since when they went to conquer one of the Great Labyrinths, the【Volcano,】they would be unable to take Myuu.

Yet, she screamed 「No!」in dissatisfaction. After giving up on convincing Myuu, he decided to just head to security.

On the way to security, Myuu, not wanting to separate from the two trustworthy people she had finally met, pulled at Hajime's hair and eye patch and scratched at his cheeks, resisting desperately.

If Shea was not there by his side smiling in a friendly manner, most people would have thought Hajime was a kidnapper. His hair was in tatters, and his eye patch was taken aside, revealing his closed eye. Hajime arrived at security with scratch marks on his cheeks and explained the situation to the people there.

The security member who heard the circumstances had a steep expression and promised to investigate the situation further as well as formally protect her. As expected, since it was a big problem, they called for assistance from their headquarters. With that, he decided to excuse himself, when…

「Onii-chan, do you hate me?」

Her eyes were wet, and she said such words with an upward gaze; there was no one who could keep presence of mind with this attack. 「Gu,」 even Hajime groaned. Though he tried again and again to explain that the man would take her back home

and he could not take her on his travels, Myuu still had a sad expression which did not budge in the least.

The security members could not stand this any longer either and pulled her away from Hajime a little forcibly. Though she cried out sadly from behind, Hajime and Shea were finally able to leave.

Naturally, Shea looked back anxiously numerous times, no longer thinking of the day as a date.

The security office also disappeared soon. When they were a far distance away, Hajime began to speak to Shea whose expression was still sunken.

Suddenly, Dogaaaan!!!! An explosion occurred behind them, Naturally, that place was…

「H, Hajime-san. That place is…」「Tch, the security office!」

The building with dark smoke rising from it was the security office they had just left.

The two ran up after nodding to one another. They imagined the worst possible situation. That is, the organization which kidnapped Myuu, to prevent information leaks, bombed the security office.

When they reached the security office, they could see glass and the door scattered throughout the road. The building itself did not suffer much damage, so there was no need to worry about it collapsing. Hajime quickly went inside and discovered the old security officer lying prone.

His arms were broken, and he was unconscious. The other staff members were in a similar state; luckily, no one was fatally wounded. While Hajime was examining them, Shea returned with an impatient expression.

「Hajime-san! Myuu-chan isn't here! I found this!」 Shea, in her hand, had a piece of paper.

—If you don't want the Sea Clan child to die, take the blue-haired rabbit to OO.

「Hajime-san, this is…」

「Apparently, they're picking a fight…」

Hajime smiled brutally as he crushed the scrap of paper in his hand. Perhaps they heard Myuu and Hajime speak in the security office and judged her to be useful as a hostage. Using this, they wanted to obtain a rare Rabbit Clan girl.

Beside Hajime, Shea had a resolute expression. 「Hajime-san! I…!」

「No need to say it. Got it. They're already my enemy… Talking is

pointless. We will destroy everything and take back Myuu.」
「Yes!」

He honestly thought it dangerous to bring her along and felt it best to separate quickly. Since he was so overwhelmed with painful events, he had an infantile mentality when it came to affection and handled it poorly.

Still, he could not simply leave her here. He had room to spare, and it was possible for him to take along this child since she would surely have a "lonely way of life" if he neglected her.

Even if he had made the decision to forsake her because it had nothing to do with him, Shea would surely be sad.

Furthermore, their enemy was trying to take Shea as well. They said they would put a hand on someone "important" to Hajime. In a word, they were "enemies." There was no need for mercy. They crossed a line they never should have.

Hajime and Shea, weapons in hand, decided to go stir up those foolish people.

「So, when we went to the place they told us to, there were a bunch of armed shits and no Myuu. They naturally intended to kill me to get to Shea. I heard Myuu was taken somewhere after we exterminated them… and you can tell the rest of the story. We went to their hideouts, one by one, and tortured the people there… and we repeated it.」

「It seems it was not just me, they had plans to capture you two as well. We thought it best to crush all places related to this

organization…」

Yue and Tio, hearing their explanation as the four moved, were amazed at Hajime's trouble constitution that allowed him to go on a date only to end up in the destruction of an underworld organization.

「… So, did you find out anything about that child, Myuu?」

「Yeah, based on our questioning, this is a big organization… and the number of facilities is also abnormal. Mind helping?」

「Mm… Leave it to me.」

「Yes, it cannot be helped, since it is Master's request.」 Yue and Tio agreed without hesitation. Hajime told them the

various hideout locations. Hajime and Yue split up from Shea and Tio as the four searched for Myuu while crushing the organization. As for why Hajime and Shea split up, it was because only the two of them had met Myuu before, and the girl would recognize someone in either group.

Near the outer wall of the Commercial Ward where both the Craftsman Ward and Sightseeing Ward were visible was a place where the eyes of the world were least focused. It was the darkness of a large city. It was dim even in the daytime, and the people traveling always had a gloomy atmosphere.

Here, there was a large seven story building. Officially, it was the stronghold of a hidden organization, “Friedhof,” and they were heavily invested in human trafficking.

Though the building was typically quiet, its eerie atmosphere was all but gone as people were noisy. There was confusion, impatience, and even fear from not understanding the situation.

With such intense movements, two people wore robes over their heads and used the chaos to enter without difficulty.

They avoided the main areas and eventually reached the highest floor, standing in front of a certain room. The thick sound of a man could be heard beyond the door as he screamed out orders.

「Don’t fuck with me! Huh!? Bastard, what the hell are you saying!?」

「Hii! L, like I said, two pairs of people have already crushed more than fifty of our facilities!」

「So what? It's just four people, can't we just kill them?」「It, it's not like we aren't Hebuu!?」

Along with a roar, there was an odd sound followed by silence. Apparently the man who was making a report was knocked out.

「Ass hole, I don't care what you do, bring those shits in front of me alive. I want to question them. I need to show them a living hell as a warning to all the five million members. Tell everyone there's a cash reward!」

With the man's orders, the room became noisy. According to the man's instructions, there would be an order to all organization members. The two hearing this nodded at one another, then one person took a mallet out and held it up.

The moment the man indoor began moving the door knob, he was hit with a massive amount of centrifugal force as the person swung the super heavy hammer.

With a roar, the door was crushed into a fine powder. The man by the door took the impact on his right side, and those nearby were covered in wounds as they were struck by fragments of the wall.

「There's no need to tell your underlings. We've come here to

question you in person.」

「Right, I will take on the people outside. Hurry up and finish, okay, Shea?」

「Thank you, Tio-san.」

Shea and Tio spoke to each other indifferently as they invaded. The members of Friedhof thought a bomb had just blown the

door to pieces, while the head of the organization, Hansen, froze with his eyes wide open. He quickly returned to his senses after hearing Tio and Shea speak and quickly called to the surrounding men to pull out their weapons.

「… Bastards, you're assaulting the entire organization… that appearance… Tch, you're the ones on the top of our list. Tio and Shea, right? Ahh, and that brat, Yue… You really do look good. Hey, if you surrender right now, won't it only help you? Surely you didn't think you could come back alive after assaulting Friedhof —」

While Hansen was talking to Shea and Tio with dirty-minded eyes, Shea attacked him with a shotgun.

Holding Drücken up in bombardment mode while looking down at Hansen with a cold gaze, not bothering to converse. Questions and answers were useless at this time.

Naturally, Hansen had taken the force of multiple pellets, the base of his right arm completely blown off, and crashed into the wall as he spun, blood spraying from his mouth. Unsure of whether he was conscious or not, his subordinate screamed out at him.

「Boss!? What was that noise just now!?」「Are you okay!?」

Though the organization members hearing the commotion ran all at once, they were at a standstill with the stairwell in flames.

「A business that preys on children… even I am a little irritated. Repent in the world of the dead.」

Tio spoke coldly as she stood at the top of the stairs, using Flame Magic to burn the path up.

Furthermore, Tio attacked with Dragon Fang and her “breath.” Even if it was a smaller version which she used with one hand, this attack was straight from a monster from hell for those who were forced into a defensive battle; naturally, they fell victim.

The Friedhof stronghold had been reduced to a miserable state excluding Hansen’s room on the 10th floor. While the building was barely escaping a collapse, a wall suddenly disappeared. The view was open. It was like looking at an anthill from above.

The various members ran out of their rooms, vacantly looking at

the floor above. It could not be helped. Their base had suddenly become half its size. Their thought process simply could not keep up.

Even so, the perverted dragon clansman was filled with righteous indignation and was unforgiving. Wind blades and flame bullets were thrown downward like Hajime's gatling gun. The members attempted to escape, but… there were few who could do so.

Tio, while taking on the organization members on her own outside, Shea held the Drücken over her shoulder and approached Hansen who was screaming and writhing in pain.

She put Drücken on his belly, and, though he tried to move away, he could only cry out in agony. With the super heavy Drücken on him, Hansen could only plead for his life disgracefully.

「P, please. Help! You can have money if you want! I don't want anything to do with you! So please, Gufu!?」

「Please do not speak without permission. You only have to answer my questions. Understand? If you don't, then I will increase the weight… I recommend you answer before your internal organs are forced out of your body.」

「… Shea, you really are Master's companion… Your speech and conduct are very similar.」

While looking over her back, Tio joked with Shea, disregarding the situation.

Shea obtained information on Myuu from Hansen. Though Hansen had a suspicious expression for a moment, when it was mentioned that she was from the Sea Clan, he quickly answered as the weight of Drücken slowly increased. Apparently, she had been taken to a hidden auction held underground later this evening.

By the way, Hansen did not know the relationship between Shea and Myuu and was unsure why she would search for a Sea Clan child.

In short, Hansen's subordinates executed this plan on their own. Since Shea was originally on the Friedhof list of those to be

kidnapped, the subordinates were likely trying to capture her on their own so they could raise their influence in the organization.

Shea touched her choker and contacted Hajime via "Telepathy."
『Hajime-san, Hajime-san. Can you hear me? This is Shea.』 『… Shea. Ah, I can hear you. What's wrong?』

『Myuu- chan's whereabouts, I found them. Hajime-san, right now, you should be in the Sightseeing Ward, right? You should be closest, so go there first.』

『Roger.』

Shea told Hajime the details. Unable to handle the weight of the Drücken, Hansen was already blue in the face.

Shea ended the Gravity Magic placed on Drücken and moved away from Hansen. Though freed, Hansen had bled a lot and nearly fainted. Still, he reached desperately to Shea for help.

「H, help… Doctor… 」

「That is far too convenient for a man who makes a living off the lives of children … Hajime-san and Yue-san will be angry if I overlook a man like you. With that said, good bye. 」

「S, stop! 」

Gusha! Shea brought down Drücken, the blood splattering away. She held it back over her shoulders and looked back at Tio.

「Tio-san, let's hurry up and destroy this place so we can join Hajime-san! 」

「Y, yes… Shea is merciless… My heart throbbed a bit… 」「…? Did you say something? 」

「N, nothing. 」

Shea felt a chill despite not hearing the quietly muttered words. Though she asked Tio again, she was only met with a feverish gaze. Afterward, they diligently took care of the Friedhof headquarters and left.

They left only a mountain of rubble lined with countless corpses. In 【Fyuren,】"Friedhof" was a massive organization, yet, on this

day, it was easily annihilated.

Hajime and Yue quickly headed to the place detailed by Shea via telepathy. If Myuu was taken from the auction hall, their mental burden would drastically increase. It was best they rescue her quickly.

「This… Yeah, there are signs below.」「… Mm.」

When they arrived, two giants wrapped in black clothes waited at the entrance. Thinking Myuu would be transported away if there was a ruckus, he used Transmute in a back alley so they could invade secretly.

He and Yue moved quickly with Presence Interception. It was regrettable that there was no cardboard box. So long as they had that, even the Presence Interception skill would be unnecessary…

Before long, they found countless prisons. One person was watching them all. They quickly passed through and found ten young children crouching on the cold stone pavement. They were likely the ones to go on auction.

Fundamentally, since most humans were believers in the teachings of the Saint Church, it was forbidden to buy and sell them.

Selling humans would be equivalent to treating them like slaves and a betrayal to God. The children were trembling together as

expected.

However, the essential Myuu was not present. Hajime bent the iron bars leading to the cells of the children who were frightened by his sudden appearance. He quietly glanced at them and asked a question quietly.

「Was there a sea girl here?」

The children, frightened, looked at each other in confusion from his unexpected question. Myuu was not there in the prison, so Hajime asked the others if she was ever there.

Though the children were silent for a time, Yue squatted down next to Hajime and looked at them kindly. She muttered 「…

You're safe now. 」Perhaps relieved by that, one boy, a 7 or 8 year old, timidly answered Hajime's question.

「Um, if you're talking about her, she was taken earlier… Nii-chan, who are you?」

Hajime clicked his tongue. He concisely answered the uneasy boy.
「I came to help.」

「Eh!? You came to help!?」

Astonishment and joy floated in the boy's face as he inadvertently shouted.

His voice echoed through the dungeon. Though the boy held his hands to his mouth in a panic, the guard obviously woke up and called out, 「Who the hell is making that noise!」

Naturally, the man found Hajime, and, after freezing for a moment, he cried out 「Who are you!」while pulling out a weapon. The children imagined Hajime and Yue being stabbed and began to scream.

However, that was impossible.

Hajime casually grasped the dagger in the man's left hand and shattered it.

The man did not understand what happened and simply looked down. Seeing only the handle remain, he turned pale and stepped back.

Hajime grabbed the man's head and threw him to the ground. With this fresh sound, the man died instantly.

「We can't have him calling the other guards.」 The children looked in surprise at him.

Hajime removed the iron bars with Transmute. The children stiffened seeing the bars destroyed in an instant.

「Yue, sorry, but can I leave them to you? It seems like I want to go on a rampage.」

「Yeah… Leave it to me.」

「Bring them to the security office as quickly as you can. The head of the Branch Office will handle things somehow… I've already contacted him with Telepathy.」

Yue looked off into the distance in sympathy.

In truth, before coming here, he had sent a Telepathy Stone to Iruwa by means of a passerby adventurer so he could explain things to Iruwa.

Being able to take care of things by having a "Gold" rank Status Plate was useful. When the adventurer saw Hajime's rank color… his voice went up an entire octave.

By the way, since Iruwa could not use Telepathy, Hajime spoke to him in a one-sided manner and simply reported that he was fighting a large organization. Naturally, Iruwa's mind blanked out when he heard this.

Within a day of Iruwa saying he hoped Hajime would have a troublesome and wonderful adventure… he felt a little cheated and could only laugh dryly in regret.

Hajime continued moving downward, using Transmute to create his passage. Before he left, the boy called Hajime to a stop.

「Nii-chan! Thanks for helping! You need to save her! She was really afraid. I couldn't do anything…」

Apparently this boy did not care if she was a Demi-human and tried to encourage her. Hajime patted the boy as he looked down in mortification at his own powerlessness.

「Wha, wh, what?」

「If you're that frustrated, you only need to get stronger. This time, I'll take care of things. Next time, you only have to do what you can.」

Hajime quickly left the prison with those words. The boy watched as he ran off with stars in his eyes.

Yue looked happily at the boy and brought the children above ground.

The auction hall was engulfed in an odd atmosphere.

There were about one hundred guests. Everyone wore a strange mask. Without raising a single noise, when a good they were targeting appeared, they calmly raised their ticket. Perhaps they were hesitant to call out.

Even those who were expecting it, the moment a specific item came out, they let out sounds of astonishment.

The object in question was Myuu, the sea girl, placed inside a water tank 2 meters a side.

Her clothes were stripped, and she was curled up in a corner of the water tank. Because the Sea Clan could breathe underwater, this was likely done to prove she was a genuine sea girl. Because she had run away before, her hands and feet were bound by metal chains. It was a miserable sight.

Myuu was frightened by the numerous gazes. Her price increased at a ferocious pace. Perhaps they thought they could buy her and conceal her. They did not know of the commotion above ground.

In this noisy hall, Myuu crouched even further. She grasped a black cloth in her hands tightly. It was Hajime's eye patch. When they separated, Hajime had completely forgotten its existence since he had given it to her to calm her down. Only afterward did he recall it.

Hajime's eye patch was Myuu's only connection to freedom.

She had been torn away from her mother, placed in a damp, dark prison, forced to go on a long journey, and soaked in sewage.

In that time, when nothing good was happening, she was wrapped in warmth. She awoke to a good smell, and looking at her was a boy with white hair and this black cloth covering one of his eyes. She wanted to look away, but the person continued to stare at her. Myuu, too, in her obstinacy, looked at him; at that time, the delicious smell tickled her nose.

Afterward, he asked her name, then, after he created a beautiful crimson light, a warm bath was made for her. It was not the boy but the rabbit-eared girl with pale blue hair and blue eyes that washed her, introducing herself as Shea, saying to call her “Onee-chan.”

Myuu sat on her knee and was given a delicious kabob to eat. She would never forget that for her entire life. While she was absorbed in eating, the boy, who introduced himself as

Hajime, brought her back some clothes.

Though she was still cautious, he took out cute clothes and politely dressed her before drying her hair with warm air. With so many good things happening one after another, her caution disappeared completely.

That was why she was so sad when he left her to security. Myuu, after being separated from her mother, was made to

endure solitude and fear for a long time and did not think she could stand separating from the gentle boy and girl she met far from her home.

She protested as best she could. She pulled on Haime’s hair, scratched his cheeks, and took his eye patch. She wanted to go with them, but, in the end, they left Myuu.

Myuu thought about them while huddling in the corner.

Are they angry because I took this black cloth? Do they dislike me? When she thought these things, she was sad. She wanted to apologize to them when she saw them again, and… she wanted to stay with them.

(Onii-chan… Onee-chan…)

When Myuu muttered this, a loud sound could be heard and something hit the water tank. Myuu looked about in fright. She noticed a man with a mask and black tuxedo shout something as he kicked the tank.

Apparently he wanted her to show the crowd she was alive, since she was not moving about at all.

However, Myuu only huddled in fright even more. She held her body and tightly grasped Hajime's eye patch and endured the sound of impacts against the water tank.

This man was a member of Friedhof and was the chairman of the auction. He feared that Myuu's lack of movement would make others think she was sick, lowering the price. He made a man bring a stick so they could poke her to move.

「This shitty brat. She's damn worthless!」

As he said this, the man climbed a ladder so he could poke her. Myuu prepared for a shock.

But that impact never came … instead, she heard the voice of someone she wanted to see.

「That's my line, won't you return her? You scum bag.」

The next moment, a shadow jumped down from the ceiling and landed on the chairman's head, crushing it on the floor. Blood scattered everywhere. He really was crushed to death.

The man who was crushed died in an instant, but Hajime ignored it and beat on the tank with his artificial arm. The tank was destroyed and the water flowed out.

「Hyau!」

Myuu was thrown out along with the flow of water. Though she screamed on instinct, she was caught and surrounded by warmth.

She timidly opened her eyes. There, the person she wanted to meet, at the moment she was most helpless, found her…

Myuu stared at Hajime like the first time they met. 「Yo, Myuu. Aren't you always soaked when we meet?」

Hajime meant to joke with her. Myuu responded in a whisper. 「… Onii-chan?」

「It's that very "Onii-chan" whose hair you pulled, cheeks you scratched, and eye patch you took.」

Hajime returned a bitter smile. Myuu's eyes were wet with tears. And…

「Onii-chan!!」

She clung to Hajime and cried. Hajime pat her back and quickly covered her in a blanket.

Men in black clothes surrounded the two. Perhaps they thought he would run away, despite showing no intent to.

「Hey, brat, you think you can stand up to Friedhof? If you put down our good, we can kill you without letting you suffer, got it?」

Twenty people enclosed them. Myuu looked up at Hajime uneasily.

「Onii-chan…」

「It's fine. I'm here. It'll get a bit messy, so cover your ears and

close your eyes.」

He brought his face close to her ears and told her to shut her eyes and cover her ears. Myuu brought her hands to her ears and closed her eyes curiously. After nodding, she buried her head in Hajime's chest.

「Bastard, what do you think you're doing, huh!?」

The men in black clothes were angry having been ignored. There was an order shouted out, Kill the brat! Don't hurt the goods!

At that moment, Dopan!! Along with the dry explosion, the head of the lead black cloths was scattered about.

Everyone looked down in surprise. Hajime took this chance and fired again. While no one understood what was going on, he had shot repeatedly. By the time they could think, twelve people were already headless.

「N, nooooo! Murder!」

「M, murder! That guy murdered someone!」

At last, they noticed the boy in front of them was something abnormal. They backed away while the guests ran out screaming.

「Y, you, what the hell are you! What, how… You!」 In confusion, one man bluffed desperately.

Hajime sneered at them.

「What? Can't you see? I only came to take back what you took from me. Also… a warning to you. If you mess with my companions, do you really think you'll get away so easily?」

When Hajime said this, he jumped to the hall ceiling using "Air Walk." He reached ground level through the hole. The area was empty already.

『Yue. I have Myuu. How about you?』

『… Yes, they're safe. I'm where the guests will come out.』

『I see. Then let's make the finale a good one.』 『Yes!』

Hajime ran through the sky using “Air Walk” while talking to Myuu.

He muttered 「You’re fine now.」She looked up and uttered a cry

of surprise.

That was obvious, though. When she opened her eyes, she was in the sky, dyed red by the evening sun.

Myuu was amazed by this spectacle she was seeing for the first time and gripped Hajime’s chest.

「Onii-chan, amazing! You can fly!」

「I’m jumping, not flying… well, that’s fine. Myuu, would you like to see some flashy fireworks?」

「Fireworks?」

「Fireworks… in short, an explosion.」「Explosion?」

Though he did not give a satisfactory explanation, Hajime did not worry much, since he would not change his plans. Holding Myuu in his right arm, he remained in the sky using “Air Walk” and took out a ring from “Treasure Warehouse.” It acted as a remote detonator for a bomb using an Induction Stone. While he was looking for Myuu, he threw many of them in suitable places.

「All right, here we go～」

「?」

At that moment, the buildings surrounding Friedhof were engulfed in a roar and a massive impact.

A powerful explosion turned them all to rubble, dying the surrounding buildings in a red different from the evening sun.

「Fuee!?」

「How is it, Myuu? Surprised?」「Fireworks are scary.」

Myuu trembled and clung to Hajime with watery eyes, frightened she might fall after the grand explosion.

「O, o, o, Onii-chan! Something came out!」

「Pretty, isn't it?」「Eh!?」

As if to further assault Myuu's mental state, dark clouds suddenly shrouded the sky, and in the next moment, four "Thunder Dragons" appeared.

Though they were about half the size of a normal one, their overpowering feeling was no different. They seemed to glare about as their bodies undulated against the dark clouds. A timid person would simply pass out.

Yue created four “Thunder Dragons.” The sky which burned red was now spewing thunder in all directions.

Perhaps every person in 【Fyuren】witnessed them and fell backward.

In the sky of this large city, four Thunder Dragons calmly swam about. In the next moment, they headed toward four important Friedhof bases and “fell” on them at the same time with a monstrous thunder clap.

An explosion of thunder, flames, and dust had gone up throughout 【Fyuren. 】With the red light of the sun shining over the town, it was reminiscent of a town destroyed by an aerial raid.

Incidentally, not a single innocent was harmed, nor were the nearby buildings harmed. Using his unmanned reconnaissance planes, “Ornis,” Hajime confirmed that only Friedhof members were burnt to cinders.

There may have been those who felt guilty for their actions or perhaps people amongst them who had room to reform, but…

for Hajime, individual character had no role in an organization’s hostility.

『Hajime-san! Is Myuu-chan safe!?』

『Wa, wait, Shea. You are moving too quickly!』

Through the smoke and flames came Shea and Tio. Since Shea was not told about the explosions via “Telepathy,” she panicked.

『Yeah, she’s fine. Their bases are crushed, too… Right, let’s go meet up with Iruwa, I’m sure he’s screaming right now.』

『Uu～ Thank goodness～ Branch Head, then? Right. I’ll mention Myuu to him first?』

『Yeah. Got it. Then, I’ll see you there.』 『Yes.』

Myuu looked curiously at Hajime who suddenly went silent and looked to the distance. Hajime asked, 「Do you want to go see Onee-chan now?」 she smiled joyfully.

Yue, who had handed the children over to security, caught up with Hajime when he landed. Myuu tightly grasped Hajime as she looked about restlessly. She looked up at Hajime; her eyes were clearly asking 「Who is this person?」

「Myuu, her name is Yue. She’s my lover.」 「Fue? Lover…? And Shea Onee-chan?」 「A friend.」

「She’s not your lover?」 「She’s not.」

「… Really?」

「What's with that… My lover is Yue.」「Muu～」

Myuu looked at Yue in dissatisfaction. Yue also looked back at Myuu, as if trying to read her.

Though the two watched each other for a while, the balance was broken. Yue slowly made her move.

「Muu,」Myuu looked at Yue suspiciously, but Yue did not care and simply took Myuu from Hajime and held her tight.

「Mugyuu～」she groaned, but Yue did not separate from her at all.

「… Cute. Too cute.」

Apparently she really liked Myuu. Puhaa, at last, Myuu caught her breath and looked at Yue at point-blank range.

「… Myuu. I am Yue. You did your best on your own. How great.」 Yue looked softly and stroked Myuu's head while closely

embracing her.

Her gentle hands and warm atmosphere brought tears to Myuu's eyes. She began to cry loudly again. When she met Hajime again,

she was still tense and could not relax. At this moment, she released all her painful emotions.

Hajime smiled wryly and watched Yue as they waited for Myuu to finish crying before they headed to the Adventurer Guild

Branch Office.

「15 collapsed houses, 32 partially destroyed buildings, 9 buildings which have completely vanished, 38 constituent members of Friedhof have been confirmed dead, 44 have not yet been identified, 28 seriously injured, and 119 missing… So? Any excuses?」

「I did it intentionally since they made me angry. I will not reflect on it or regret it.」

「Haaa～～～～～～～～」

In the reception room in the adventurer guild, Iruwa stared at Hajime intensely while holding a report in his hand… He had no words to say seeing Hajime showing no sign of reflection as he held a sea girl on his knees.

「Though I didn't think of this… In Meerstraat, Reaman's water tank was destroyed and it managed to escape… that's unrelated, right?」

「… Myuu, is this delicious? Go on and eat.」「Ahh～」

Hajime calmly fed Myuu cake, but Iruwa did not overlook Shea's eyes move about. Again, he sighed deeply. Dot, to his side, rubbed his back and casually passed Iruwa stomach medicine.

「Well, I can't say this isn't a problem, but we've also been troubled by this organization… It's actually hard to think they survived this long. They don't leave any signs, and they are officially carrying out honest trade. Even if we try to arrest them for illegal activities, it's like trying to catch a lizard by its tail… It was just a dream that we could even think of extermination. Right now… the balance of the underworld has greatly changed… I guess adventurers will have to cooperate with security, since this will be serious for a while.」

「Well, Fyuren will just have to deal with this. In the first place, they tried to put a hand on us, I just counter attacked…」

「That wasn't a counteroffensive, you annihilated one of the three

major underworld organizations of Fyuren in less than half a day, right? This is hardly a joking matter.」

Iruwa smiled bitterly, he aged another 20 years in an instant, it seemed. Alongside with the 10 years he felt he had aged when seeing the group's Status Plates, he was like an old grandfather at this point. Since he looked pitiful, Hajime proposed an idea to Iruwa.

「For the time being, I did that so any criminal knows not to put a hand on us. As branch head, can't you use our names yourself? If you like, you could even say you employed a "Gold"… It would work well as a deterrent, right?」

「Oh, is that okay? That would really help… but don't you dislike being used?」

Hearing Hajime's words, Iruwa showed his surprise, but his eyes were going 「Eh? Seriously? That's a life saver!」 Hajime smiled wryly and shrugged.

「Well, it's give and take. I'm indebted for all the care you've given me. For you, I can make an allowance, too. Also, it was my fault that Fyuren might be involved in the underworld's business. I feel a bit bad.」

「… Hmm. Hajime-kun, have you changed a little bit? When we first met, I thought you didn't care about anything but your companions… Did something good happen in Ul?」

「… Well, it wasn't bad for me.」

As expected of the leader of the guild branch in a large city. He noticed a slight change in Hajime. Because it was a welcome change, Iruwa gratefully received Hajime's proposal.

By the way, the other organizations schemed against each other to take advantage of the collapse of Friedhof, but Iruwa effectively used Hajime's name.

In fact, he earned yet more nicknames such as “Dagger of the Fyuren Branch Head,” “Explosive White- haired Eye Patch,” and “Little Girl Killer”… naturally, Hajime did not know this.

Unexpectedly, Hajime was helped by Iruwa in another way. He gave the excuse that Hajime had a legitimate reason for self-

defense to the security office which was busy with the aftermath of Hajime’s wild rampage.

Incidentally, the director of the security office, who greeted everyone on his 60th birthday, was smiling knowing a large underworld organization, which had always held him in derision, had collapsed. Indeed, his steps were light as he hummed merrily.

「As for Myuu-kun…」

Iruwa looked at Myuu who was eating a cookie with both hands like a squirrel.

Myuu jumped in surprise and looked uneasy at the prospect of being torn away from Hajime and Yue. She looked at Shea and Tio as well… It was the role of the elderly to prevent a child from being harmed.

「I can keep her here, or you can follow the proper procedure, I leave that to you… So what will you do?」

The kidnapped child was from the Sea Clan; according to Iruwa, with Hajime's rank as "Gold," he could easily leave Myuu's protection to the proper authorities.

Even here, Iruwa showed off his versatility… It was not as if he was appealing to Hajime, he was simply supporting him.

「Hajime-san… I, I will definitely protect her. So, let's go together… Please.」

Shea bowed to Hajime. She truly wanted to stay with the girl until Myuu was brought back home. Yue and Tio watched Hajime in silence.

「Onii-chan… Together?」

She looked up at him from his knees. It was completely foul play. Since she was asking him, he had already reached an answer.

「Well, I figured I'd help from the start… I like her, and it wouldn't be good to just say goodbye like this.」

「Hajime-san!」「Onii-chan!」

Shea and Myuu had smiles covering their entire face. Before heading to 【Marine City Erisen,】Hajime intended to conquer

the 【Guryuen Volcano,】but he steeled himself and allowed Myuu to stay with them.

「But you know, Myuu, can you stop calling me Onii-chan? Hajime is good enough. How should I say it, it sounds weird when you call me like that.」

Hajime made a request of Myuu who was clinging to the table. As a former otaku, being called "Onii-chan"… well, there were a variety

of problems with it.

Myuu tilted her head curiously and nodded… the answer she gave them was beyond what anyone expected, not to mention Hajime.

「… Then, Papa.」

「… Wh, what? Sorry, Myuu, but I don't think I heard you correctly. One more time.」

「Papa.」

「… S, so it's that? Is that a word that means "Onii-chan" or "Hajime" in your language?」

「No, Papa is papa.」「Right, wait a minute.」

Hajime held his forehead then quietly asked Myuu why she called him "Papa." Then…

「I don't have a papa… I was told God made me… there was only Ki-chan and Ri-chan and Mi-chan, too… that's why Onii-chan is Papa.」

「I understand that, but still… Myuu. Please don't call me Papa. I'm still only 17, aren't I?」

「No, you're Papa!」

「Fine. Onii-chan is fine! Just don't call me Papa, please!」
「Yay～～!! Papa is Myuu's Papa～!」

Afterward, though he tried many methods to get Myuu to stop calling him "Papa," she showed an unexpected stubbornness and, in the end, did not relent.

He could only head to 【Erisen 】and get her mother to do something about it; Hajime seemed to suffer the most damage from this.

After they returned to the hotel after their talks with Iruwa, there was a dispute as to who would be "Mama" to Myuu. For now, only

Tio was out of the question, since she would be a bad influence, so he tied her up; naturally, she rolled about the floor happily…

In the end, only Myuu's true mother could be "Mama," so Tio, Yue, and Shea were simply called "Onee-chan."

That night, Yue, not being the one Myuu called "Mama,"

「… Hajime, I want a baby.」

Hajime had a cold sweat because, given how she was appealing to him, the day Yue would be called "Mama" might not be far off.

Though Shea also did a similar appeal, Hajime was able to brush her off. Completely dissatisfied, beside Shea, was everyone's worthless dragon.

「Master, I am also prepared. Anytime you—」

「There's a limit to joking.」

「Only I am left out!?」

Needless to say, she writhed about in agony after he beat Tio into the floor.

The next day, Iruwa, the people of the security office, and Earl Kudeta's family, saw Hajime off as he carried Myuu. This little girl was being carried piggyback with Hajime supporting her feet so she would not fall while Myuu herself was tightly clinging to Hajime's head, in all respects, the picture of a father and daughter.

This day, Hajime became a Papa at the age of 17. His travels with a child would begin from now on!

Chapter 2

An intense explosion sounded out through the gloomy Labyrinth lit in a light green color. It was intense; sometimes the Labyrinth wall vibrated.

A silver sword line drew a beautiful curve through space while beams of fire, wind, and water flew about like a barrage. Yells filled the area; this once silent region was now a battlefield.

「Light that rends the universe, Wind that rages violently, Dance and whirl like one hundred flowers scattered to the wind, Mince mine enemy in a storm of light! “Heavenly Soaring Destruction!”」

While accelerating his sword arm, numerous blades of light were shot out starting around Kouki. The demons he fought were bat demons with a length of 50 centimeters, and he had cut through ten or more in an instant; they fell to the ground, covering it in blood.

「Forward! Count 10!」

「「「Roger!」」」

Ant demons moved about, their mandibles going gichi gichi, while bat demons flitted through the sky and sea anemone demons undulated. Many creatures surrounded them in a round room about 30 meters in diameter. There were eight tunnels leading into surrounding rooms, and demons were overflowing from there.

They were on Floor 89 of 【Orcus Great Labyrinth,】and Kouki, Ryuutarou, Shizuku, Nagayama, Hiyama, and Kondo served as forwards.

Kouki called out a movement count so the rear guard could perform an all-out magic attack.

The bat demons were troublesome since they could fly, and though they charged at the forwards, “Tempest Wall” acted as a rampart for them.

「A momentary storm, A shield not seen, Rampage, Blow, Whirl,

Reject everything — “Holy Boundary!”」

Taniguchi Suzu, class “Barrier Master,” utilized the active defense magic.

She stepped forward from the rear and shot a breeze from the tip of her hands. There was no external change. The bat demons did not worry about Suzu’s existence, either; they simply attacked the rear sensing a large-scale magic attack coming.

However, the sudden appearance of a wall of air greatly impeded their movements. Though they collided into it one after another, the wall of air simply bent slightly and did not let them pass.

The moment when the wall of air reached its limit, it exploded with a violent impact.

It created a terrific gust, crushing the bodies nearby. Even the Labyrinth walls were destroyed; it produced a fresh sound of crushing death.

「Hmph! I won’t let you pass so easily!」

Suzu, the mood maker of the class, had a spirited voice which sounded out even in the intense battle. The advance guard grouped together and boldly moved, all at once. Instead of taking advantage of the enemy’s close proximity and weakened state, they took distance.

「Retreat!」

It was Kouki’s order, the forwards moved away quickly.

The next moment, six magic attacks from the rear were activated with perfect timing.

A huge fireball caused a loud explosion with its impact, and the battlefield was violated with a vacuum -like tornado which tore up the surrounding demons. Spears of stone appeared from below, skewering the demons' lower bodies, and a heavy rain of icicles tore through their upper bodies.

It was impossible for them to survive when they were violently shred apart by fangs which appeared in space. The fight only took tens of seconds, but more than 90% of the demons had been mortally wounded.

「Yeah! That's it! Let's take care of the rest quickly!」

With Kouki's shout, the forwards ran out again and defeated the demons who were not killed by the magic. It took less than 5 minutes for all the demons to be killed.

With the end of battle, Kouki and the others congratulated each other for the good fight and began to search the surroundings.

「Fuu, next will be Floor 90… We can already defeat the demons here without too much difficulty… Battle training in this Labyrinth will also soon end.」

「We can't be too careful. We don't know what kind of traps or demons lay beyond this.」

「Aren't you too worried, Shizuku? We're currently fighting at a level no one else could achieve. No matter what comes along, we'll

handle it!」

Shizuku cautioned Kouki, but Ryuutarou simply laughed in excitement. Kouki made a fist and smiled fearlessly as well.

While sighing, Shizuku knit her eyebrows. To date, they had to follow the two's excessive actions. Shizuku was more frustrated than usual now. Still, after all they had been through, Kouki moved forward, he really was naturally dense.

「Hiyama-kun, Kondo-kun, I should be done healing you… how is it?」

While the previous battle was going on, Kaori was fulfilling her duty as a "Healer," of healing people who were injured in the previous battle.

Tentatively, fifteen people were fighting to conquer the Labyrinth while the rest were being treated by her and another "Healer."

「… Ahh, there's no pain left. Thanks, Shirasaki」「Y, yeah, I'm good. Thanks.」

Kaori treated Hiyama who was absent- minded from seeing Kaori up close. Kondo, too, was red as he bowed in thanks while stammering.

Since he was often fighting in the front as well, Hiyama was indebted to Kaori's healing; still, he could not maintain presence of mind when she touched him.

Kondo's attitude was, well, like that of a child going through puberty… dark emotions collected beneath Hiyama's eyes as he looked at Kaori. Though thick… no one seemed to notice.

Kaori simply said 「Don't mention it」with a smile as she stood and walked away.

A bit away, another "Healer," Tsuji Ayako who had a large forehead with her bangs to the side, had finished treating Nagayama Juugo. He had a large figure and was his companions' shield. She wiped the sweat off her brow and let out a deep breath.

The rear line's "Earth Magician" Nomura Kentaro and Yoshino Mao, the "Support Magician," with this, all members of the Nagayama Party were safe…

Someone tugged at her sleeve. Endo Kousuke showed a small wound on his arm, crying because of the injury rather than the thinness of his existence. Even if he waited for a long time, he had not been noticed, and treatment of everyone had been finished. 「Crap!」surely he was not forgotten. Seeing such good relations (?) amongst the Nagayama Party, Kaori, confirming no one else needed treatment, let out a small sigh. She looked into the dim passage leading deeper down with

eyes full of anxiety. 「…」

Shizuku, noticing her appearance, understood the emotions her best friend felt. Kaori's mind was filled with unease. They would reach the bottom in just another ten floors (according to common

thought,) yet they had not found even a single sign of Hajime.

Though she had hope, she was overwhelmed with despair. Even if she decided she would not believe Hajime had died until she confirmed it with her own eyes, every time they descended, her mind filled with negative thoughts. Furthermore, it had been 4 months since he fell into the Abyss. Even if she was determined, it was more than enough time for the dark thoughts to invade.

Seeing Kaori tightly grasp her white cane, Shizuku was going to call out to her.

But before Shizuku could take action, the class moodmaker, perhaps seeing Kaori being uneasy, ran up and jumped at her, clinging to Kaori's back.

「Kaorin～! Don't heal them, heal Suzu～! Hurry up and raise your healing stick～」

「Hyawa! Suzu-chan!, where are you hurt! Actually, you're not hurt at all, Suzu-chan!」

「I am! My heart is made of glass! So spoil me! In short, let me touch your breasts!」

「B, breasts… No! Ah, hey! Yaa! Shizuku-chan, help!」

「Haa, haa, it's fine, isn't it? Just a bit more? Don't you like it deep inside Hebu!?」



「… Haa, whatever, Suzu. The boys probably can't stand anymore… because they're standing…」

Suzu turned toward the boys as she began groping Kaori but was quickly met with a chop to the head from Shizuku. Incidentally, seeing Kaori involved in a lesplay scene had hit the boys hard.

Suzu convulsed on the ground, and Nakamura Eri seemed to smile bitterly as always.

「Uu～ Thank you, Shizuku-chan. That was embarrassing…」
「There, there, you're fine. I took out the pervert, okay?」 Shizuku gently pet Kaori who was clinging to her with watery eyes. It was something she saw often these days. Shizuku petting Kaori who had a troubled gaze while Suzu watched them happily from the side.

Apparently it was a means to divert their emotions temporarily. In

this sense, Shizuku felt admiration for Suzu, the mood maker of the class.

「Another ten floors… Let's work hard, Kaori.」

Shizuku, while putting strength in her hand on Kaori's shoulder, looked straight into her eyes. It was encouragement so her friend would not break; Kaori, seeing her friend with such a strong gaze, realized her weakness and returned the gaze.

「Right. Thanks, Shizuku-chan.」

Shizuku's gaze softened as Kaori's spirit was energized…

Once again, those from the side looked at this scene and glanced about awkwardly as the two entered a world of their own.

「Right now… I wonder if I can properly defend him?」

「That's right… I'm sure you can. You're different from before…

Your level is already beyond Meld's… But, fu fu, he may have gotten stronger, too. He's always helping us.」

「Fu fu, really… Shizuku-chan…」

Shizuku joked with Kaori who was looking down on herself, asking her if she could protect Hajime who Kaori thought survived. Though there was a variety of emotion behind those words…

that was something they would learn later.

Commander Meld and the knights of the Kingdom retired and guarded the teleport formations on Floor 30 and Floor 70; with their own power, Kouki's group had reached the stage where they were amongst the top of those in Tortus.

= = = =

Class:	Martial Artist
STR:	820
VIT:	820
RES:	680
AGI:	550
MAG:	280
MDEF:	280
Skill:	**Martial Arts** [+Body Strengthening] [+Partial Strengthening] [+Intense Strengthening] [+Deep Blow] □ **Ground Contraction** □ **Physical Tolerance** [+Hardness] □ **All Attributes Resist**
	□**Language Comprehension**

= = = =

Skill: **Swordsmanship** [+Kill Speed Up] [+Sword Draw Speed

Up] **Ground Contraction** [+Heavy Ground Contraction] [+Quaking Legs] [+Motionless] **Foresight** **Physical Perception** **Hidden Blow** [+Illusion Beat] **Language**

Comprehension

= = = =

[＋Duration Up] [＋Continuous Composition] [＋Multiple Composition] [＋Delay Motion] **Language Comprehension**

＝＝＝

They carefully walked down the dim spiral staircase while checking for traps. And after traveling about 10 meters downward, they finally reached Floor 90.

The group kept watch to see if something would happen, but it did not seem to have a structure any different from those of the floors above. They immediately began to search and map the surroundings; even if the structure did not change, they could not relax since strong demons might appear.

Nothing seemed different. The search went well. Before long, people began to get suspicious.

「… What's going on?」

When they had gotten deep inside, they arrived at a large and mysterious hall. Kouki asked aloud. Since the other people were similarly confused, they also turned to Kouki in doubt.

「… Why aren't we finding any demons though we've been searching for so long?」

They had already searched through half the paths, yet they had not been attacked by anything powerful. Normally it would take a long time to search half a floor.

However, since Kouki's group arrived at the 90th Floor, only 3 hours had passed. The reason for this was simply because they did not encounter any demons.

Though everyone thought demons might be observing them, even with the use of perception skills and magic, they found no signs of enemies. It was beyond odd and simply abnormal.

「… How should I put it, it's eerie. Was it like this at the beginning?」

Like Ryuutarou, everyone discussed the possibilities. Still, their confusion only grew deeper.

「… Kouki. Should we return? I don't feel good about this. Meld and the others might know something.」

Shizuku proposed caution.

Hearing Shizuku's proposal, Kouki hesitated. Kouki also had a bad feeling. If he wanted to be careful, it was best to return.

But this would be an issue they would have to break through anyway; there was little sense in turning back over some vague anxiety. Furthermore, they had a little room to relax in their margin of error even on Floor 89.

When Kouki hesitated, unexpectedly, Endo found something in the vicinity and called out.

「This… is blood… isn't it?」

Endo spoke while running his finger along the ground. The rest looked at the ground and walls carefully. Then,

「It's hard to see in this light, and it blends in the wall… but it's over here, too.」

「Hey, hey… this… is a huge amount…」

Nagayama had a stern expression as he grew more vigilant, and Nomura glanced about with a cramp in his face.

The others also noticed. There was a large amount of blood

scattered about; they all turned blue.

「Amanogawa, you should do as Yaegashi-san proposes. This is demon blood. It's new, too.」

Endo rubbed his fingers together and smelled the blood on it and spoke with a strong tone unlike him. Kouki groaned a little as he brought up a small rebuttal.

「So it's demon blood, if there is a demon here which is killing the others, it must be strong… before we go further, won't we need to kill it anyway?」

Nagayama shook his head to Kouki's rebuttal. Nagayama, though one of the two giants of the class like Ryuutarou, was very prudent.

Nagayama looked at the surroundings and stood up, preparing to fight as he spoke to Kouki.

「Amanogawa… Not a single demon has appeared. In the passages and rooms we've been in, it's been the same. However, we discovered signs of it here. In other words…」

「… The demon which has been hiding its tracks will attack?」
Nagayama nodded to Shizuku's words. Kouki looked sternly about

and raised his caution to the maximum.

「… Though there's the possibility of it being a demon with intelligence… but to conceal things so quickly so we'd only find traces…」

— You could say this is the starting point.

Kouki's words were taken over by a woman. She had a husky voice and spoke with a masculine intonation. Kouki turned to the source of the voice and prepared to fight.

Kon, kon, her footsteps sounded. She was a woman of a young age with burning red hair. The sound reverberated throughout the chamber. Her ears were pointed and her skin was dark.

They looked in astonishment. The woman had characteristics they were familiar with. Though they had never actually seen such a person, the features of this race were driven into their head many times. They were created by the gods which opposed the teachings

of the Saint Church and mankind's oldest

enemy…

「… Devil.」

The female devil smiled coldly.

The female devil with red hair smiled coldly as she looked at Kouki and the others, as if observing them.

The color of her eyes was as red as her hair, and she was garbed in dull, solid-black clothes, like a rider suit. Since it adhered to her body, her splendid curves were visible, even in the dim Labyrinth.

With her figure and burning red hair which flowed down her body, slightly revealing her pointed ears, Kondo, Nakano, Saitou as well, were blushing.

「You're the Hero, right? You look like an idiot, wearing such bright armor.」

「I, idiot… Uu, shut up! I won't be made fun of by a devil! Actually, why are you even here!」

Kouki quickly lost his temper after recovering from his astonishment and asked why she was here.

However, the woman ignored his question and continued speaking.

「How straight forward. I guess I'm here to solicit the Hero? Are you even useful? Well, these are my instructions, no matter what I say.」

She said unexpected words with a somewhat annoyed atmosphere.

「You with the pointlessly bright armor. Want to come to our side?」

「Wh, what? What are you saying… What is your purpose!」「It seems you're slow, too. I meant exactly what I said. My main

purpose is to solicit the Hero. Won't you come join us devils? We can give you some preferable treatment, too.」

Kouki took a few seconds to understand these completely unexpected words. When he finally digested them, his classmates looked at him while Kouki stared at the woman. He had a tight expression as he glared at her.

「I refuse! Humans… my companions… the people of the Kingdom … I couldn't possibly betray them. I heard Devils were a wicked existence. Though you took all this trouble to come get me, it was foolish to come alone. You're outnumbered. Surrender!」

Everyone had a look of relief hearing Kouki's words. Though they thought he would refuse immediately because it was Kouki, it was true they were uneasy. It seemed his childhood friends, Ryuutarou and Shizuku, were not concerned in the least.

Kouki did not waver as he threw out caustic words.

But the female devil screwed up her eyes slightly and observed him as he refused; she did not seem to particularly mind. On the contrary, she conceded more conditions.

「I'll just ask in case, but what about your friends? Are they good?」

「The answer is the same! No matter how many times you ask, we have no intention of betraying mankind!」

Kouki responded without hesitation. It was unpleasant to receive a solicitation like this; Kouki's Holy Sword was bathed in light. Questions are useless, I will force you to surrender by sheer strength! That was Kouki's intent.

With Kouki's action, it was not the female devil who showed a sense of haste but Nagayama and Shizuku.

The two clicked their tongues mentally; they had hoped to take proper precautions from the female devil in terms of their surroundings. Nagayama used hand signals behind his back; seeing

this, Endo soundlessly disappeared.

The two, according to circumstances, thought it may be necessary to change locales, even if it meant lying to the woman, but because Kouki answered angrily before they could tell him, they had to reluctantly prepare for the unavoidable.

Thinking normally, even for Devils who excel in magic, coming to a place like this alone was foolhardy. She had flawlessly annihilated the demons of this level, and, furthermore, she had managed to hide any signs of it. For a devil this strong,

there would be little humans would be able to do.

While the fifteen humans felt pressed here, the woman showed no signs of difficulty, rather, she likely waited here.

- We're not alone in the Great Labyrinth, this is the enemy territory!

This sense of crisis was proven immediately.

「… Fine. Then we have no business. Though I should say this first… You're naive thinking you won't be killed for refusing my invitation here. Rist, Hevel, Enki. Time to eat!」

The Devil woman called out three names. Shizuku and Nagayama

moaned as they were blown away.

「!?」

「Gu!?」

The identity of what blew them away was unknown. Kouki immediately swung his sword to the right and left when, at the command of the woman, “something” approached and pounced on his classmates who were not prepared.

From the start, Shizuku and Nagayama were as cautious as they could possibly be yet barely noticed the surprise attack as they took a defensive stance to protect the other students.

Shizuku, because she was a speed-based fighter, had a low defense. She managed to reduce the strength of the attack by swinging her sword into the empty space before the impact met her, but she still flew backward, the air escaping from her lungs.

Nagayama was a “Martial Artist,” and he was particularly adept at defense with the grappling style. He had the skill “Strength of Gold” a derived skill from “Body Strengthening,” so his durability was beyond a steel shield. Matched with his large frame, one could call him a human fortress.

However, even Nagayama’s defense was surpassed by the attack of this “something,” his arms torn apart, scattering blood. He was thrown to the ground, knocking into Hiyama and the students behind him.

A crushing sound, like the sound of glass shattering, marked the

fall of the Barrier Magic Suzu recited when she noticed Shizuku

enter battle mode along with her own instinctive sense of crisis.

As a back-line fighter, she did not feel the presence of this “something,” but based on Shizuku and Nagayama’s positioning and her own instincts coupled with their experiences, she took quick action and set up a another barrier behind them.

Without this barrier, Nagayama and the others may have been torn apart mercilessly.

But she was exposed to the impact and was thrown back as the barrier was crushed.

Fortunately, she was caught by Eri behind her. Still, there was a third enemy already in pursuit; they had not escaped danger yet.

Once the third barrier was torn apart, the pursuit began immediately. Shizuku and Nagayama were injured and blown away, and Suzu and the rear line could not react to the sudden attack

The moment the third barrier was torn apart, amongst the classmates who could not react, there was no time!

Their lives would be lost — when it seemed that would be the case, at that moment,

「Grant us the protection of the light! “Restoration,” “All Heavens,”

“Heavenly Divide!”」

Kaori chanted an aria, cutting it as shortly as she feasibly could, and immediately cast three Light Magics.

“Restoration” was an Intermediate Rank Recovery Magic which immediately healed Shizuku and Nagayama who were blown away. It was a magic which instantly healed objects at separate distant locations.

Bathed in light, the two struggled to stand as they groaned in pain. Their wounds began healing at an abnormal rate.

Also, if they did not pay attention for even a single moment, the three existences would attack. They had lost track of the

enemy. Shizuku and Nagayama were engulfed by light which soon spread out, creating an outline in space.

Intermediate Rank Recovery Magic, “All Heavens.” It was a Recovery Magic which healed the target automatically at regular intervals, though the actual amount was small. This magic had a side effect of brightening the surroundings. Kaori used this to recover them as well as to reveal the unknown enemy.

The figures revealed by the white light had hands and feet like a dragon, a tail of a snake, sharp talons, wings of an eagle, and the head of a lion. In short, they were chimera. They likely had a

unique magic that allowed them to camouflage themselves. It was a troublesome ability that allowed them to remove their appearance as well as their signs.

Shizuku and Nagayama, two of the class's strongest close range combatants, were incapacitated in a single blow. The enemy was undoubtedly powerful. They could also disappear completely, making it an impossible fight. This clearly deviated

from the level of demons that should have been on this level.

「「「Gruaaaaaa」」」

The three chimera began targeting Shizuku, Nagayama, and Suzu; however, their teeth and claws did not reach the three. Three shields of light appeared before the three people, diverting the Chimeras' attacks at the last moment.

Intermediate Rank Barrier Magic, "Heavenly Divide." It was a higher ranking version of a Beginner Rank Barrier Magic which created a shield of light, "Absolute Light." When applied to Suzu's "Tempest Wall," it replenished the shield at a high speed. Though the barriers themselves were weak, they regenerated quickly, so the magic was like a high-speed, multi-layer barrier that required time to break through.

Kaori, despite her proficiency in Light Magic, was not as strong in barriers as Suzu who specialized in them; as such, she could not make strong barriers. At most, she could fine-tune something that was already created.

This was a result of constant studying so she would not lose. Due to

the effort Kaori put in, enough to make one vomit blood, she had defended all their lives in this crisis.

The three chimera began moving to attack again. She had only been able to buy a moment. In the end, it was still the struggles of a weak person.

The time Kaori earned was but a moment, but even that moment was useful. Kouki and the others would not possibly miss it.

「Get away from Shizuku!!」

Kouki, shouting in indignation, used “Ground Contraction.” He quickly approached the chimera, leaving an after image as he brandished the Holy Sword, swinging it down toward the chimera’s neck.

At the same time, 「Like I’d let you!」

Ryuutarou thrust his fist forward toward the chimera attacking Nagayama. Rather than attacking it directly, he judged it better to attack it with a shock wave generated by his gauntlet artifact. Ryuutarou yelled as he ran magic through the gauntlet.

Also,

「Swallow, Red Mother — “Flame Wave!!”」

Eri held Suzu with one hand while thrusting her other forward in a show of strength she had not done so until now, using a powerful magic while omitting much of the aria. Intermediate Rank Flame Magic, “Flame Wave” which, like its name, manipulated a tsunami of fire. Even a quick enemy could not easily avoid it.

Kouki quickly brought down his Holy Sword. Ryuutarou shot a violent shock wave from his fist like a large cannonball, and Eri's storm of fire carried with it a premonition of death toward their enemies.

Even so…

「「Rugaaaa!!」」

They had hidden somewhere. The moment Kouki's attack struck

one enemy, three more shadows pounced on the class.

「!?」

「What,」

A chill ran down Kouki and Ryuutarou's spines.

Two shadows were rushing at Kouki and Ryuutarou, large metallic maces in hand.

Kouki twisted his body while Ryuutarou bent his left arm and thrust his right hand out.

Kouki lost his balance as he diverted the mace's attack, while Ryuutarou was blown away, despite dampening the blow with his own attack.

What surprised Kouki and Ryuutarou were two large brutal demons 2 meters tall.

They were the so-called orc and ogre of RPG games. While they looked like pigs, they were fairly intelligent demons. They strengthened their body to the utmost. Since the attack was unexpected, the two could not match in speed.

「What is this?」

「These bastards, where are they coming from?」

Kouki and Ryuutarou had not seen them until now, and suddenly these strong demons appeared; they could not help but swear and voice their doubts. Then,

「Gua!?」

Someone cried out in agony. Endo, who had vanished a while ago, was thrown between the two.

「Endo!?」

「Gu, careful, everyone! You can't see them! But they're still there!」

Kouki called out to Endo in surprise who held his injured side and gave a warning.

Endo, after receiving Nagayama's instructions, erased his presence and moved behind the female devil to quietly assassinate her.

Before he could take her back, the situation had changed, so he had decided to close the distance, even if it meant revealing

his presence; then he had received a powerful impact to his flank and blown aside. He saw at that time. The enemy who blew him away was the same as what blew the others away.

There was a chimera beside the brutal demons; after blowing him away, it touched the brutal demons who disappeared.

In a word, they were borrowing the chimera's camouflage ability and lurking here and there. There were more than enough to annihilate the demons of Floor 90.

As if to prove Endo's warning, fresh forces appeared near Eri. Hyuooooo! The tsunami of flames Eri created gathered to one point and disappeared. It was as if a hole in space had

absorbed it. 「No way… 」

Seeing her magic nullified, Eri's gaze hardened; the heat itself had disappeared as well.

From the space came the enemy. It was a turtle 6 feet large. Its shell was dyed red like a raging flame.

The next moment, the turtles opened their jaws and shot out an intense attack, as if shooting a laser from a gun.

「N, not good, 」

Eri, seeing this, had an impatient expression. The magic she shot herself was now being released against them. Still, her best friend's voice blew away her anxiety.

「Don't screw with me! Continuous light of protection, Revive in tandem with my will! "Heavenly Divide!"」

In that moment, ten shields of light created by Suzu appeared before her. The shields were all slanted at 45 degree angles. The bombardment of high-temperature lasers were diverted, each shield disappearing as it was hit.

Still, the power of the attacks were continuous. They ate through the shields in an instant. Suzu created shields one after another while chanting with her teeth clenched. Bringing her abilities as a "Barrier Master" to the very limits, she constructed shields as quickly as they were shattered, barely averting the attacks.

The stone was scorched and fell from the ceiling like rain. 「Damn it! What is this!」

「What is with these demons!」 「Shit, anyway, let's do this!」

Though Hiyama's party, as well as Nagayama, called out in confusion, they were still perfectly prepared to fight.

「Nagayama- kun! I'm cutting in deep! I leave the rear to you!」
「Yeah, leave it to me! Go, Yaegashi!」

Shizuku and Nagayama, whose wounds were completely recovered, began attacking the chimeras before them.

Shizuku entered a high-speed world where even her after image could not be seen, causing a sonic boom. The moment the sound was heard, she appeared behind the chimera and drew her sword.

She attacked without any preceding motions; “Motionless” was a skill that made it impossible to read the presence of an attack; rather than saying the attack was fast, it was simply that the enemy’s cognition could not keep up with the movements. Furthermore, she was drawing her sword repeatedly using a derivative skill of Swordsmanship. For an ordinary living creature, it was impossible to even recognize the attack.

What she used was one of the Yaegashi style ancient sword skills, “Void Sever” Suiting its name, it seemed to cut the space before it, leaving only a trail of silver as the chimera was cut.

「Guuraaaa!!」

The chimera roared in anger and attacked with its claws; however, its attack cut through the air. Shizuku had already run around

and tore apart its wings. 「Ku!」

Shizuku used her speed to steadily damage it; however, while she looked fine, she involuntarily let out a voice of annoyance.

Shizuku had intended to cut its body in two with a single blow but her first attack did not follow through with her desires. Her second attack as well was intended to cut its body, but it had bent away, leading to its wings being the only thing torn off.

The chimera could not follow Shizuku's speed; however, its reaction speed was on par with her footwork. Shizuku wanted to quickly knock it down and help the others, it truly was a troublesome opponent.

The third strike, the fourth strike, she attacked again and again, giving it countless wounds, but every attack was shallow. Shizuku was growing hasty.

The bad feeling grew further for Shizuku and the others.
「Kyuwaaa!!」

Suddenly, along with the cry, the chimera's wings and snake tail, which had been cut off, were wrapped in a crimson light and were immediately healed.

Compared to this, Kaori's "All Heavens" was insignificant. Shizuku looked with wide eyes at the source of the yell which had healed the chimera.

While they were unaware, a crow with two white heads stepped on the woman's shoulders as she watched like an unconcerned spectator. One of the heads was looking straight at the chimera.

「There's even a Healer!?」

The shallow wounds they worked hard to give were healed in an instant. The more time passed, the more easily the demons could adapt, increasing their chances of winning, and they now had a Healer in the rear. Shizuku cried out on reflex.

It was not just Shizuku, her companions also raised similar sorrowful shouts.

Kouki, who was also receiving support, fought with a brutal demon, and though he injured it severely, cutting it from shoulder to waist, even this wound was healed, the white crow's other head gazing at the fight.

Ryuutarou and Nagayama were no different. They had managed to tear away a large portion of a brutal demon's abdomen at the cost of Ryuutarou's right hand, but the white crow head healing the chimera fighting Shizuku cried out once again and healed the brutal demon's wounds.

「You seem to be in a serious situation. What will you do? Will you join our side? It's not too late, is it?」

The devil had her arms crossed and asked Kouki, who was fighting hard, again. She remained calm as she asked. The answer she expected came to her.

「Don't screw with me! We won't yield to threats! We won't lose! I'll prove it! Here I go, "Limit Break!"」

Kouki looked indignantly at the words and attitude of the female devil. The brutal demons lowered their maces, taking advantage of the moment Kouki used “Limit Break.”

“Limit Break” was a skill that temporarily consumed magic to increase one’s basic stats threefold. However, since it literally was breaking through one’s physical limit, prolonged use would wear away the body. After its use, one would be weakened proportional to the time it was activated. The user would only be able to demonstrate half his typical fighting strength. As such, it was necessary to think about when to use it since it was a skill of last resorts.

Kouki, seeing the demons recover, judged that his companions’ morale had fallen drastically. He was going to defeat the woman and the white crow in an instant using “Limit Break.”

With a declaration of his use of “Limit Break,” a pure light wrapped around his body. At that time, the brutal demon’s attack was blown aside, but it quickly attacked again.

「A blade’s will, Rend the enemy with light, “Light Blade!”」 Kouki stooped down and, with the light shrouding his Holy Sword,

swept upward from below.

Though “Light Blade” had little effect on the brutal demon before, compounded with “Limit Break” which multiplied Kouki’s stats by three, the arcs of light cut through the demon like butter.

The top half of the demon’s body shifted diagonally as it crumbled to the ground. Kouki quickly rushed forward toward the woman.

There was nothing separating Kouki and the devil. Though superior in magic, no matter what she did, it would be too

late. He would cut her and the white crow and end it. That was what everyone thought.

At that moment,

「「「「「Guuruaaaa!!!」」」」」

「Wha!?」

With a fluctuation in space, five chimeras appeared simultaneously with a roar and attacked Kouki. Completely surrounded, Kouki instinctively raised his sword and cried out.

He bent his body and stopped abruptly to avoid an attack from the front as he cut a chimera down with his Holy Sword to the right. Believing in his armor, he received a blow from behind and endured.

Even so, the chimera's nails tore through his left shoulder, pushing

Kouki down. 「Guu!」

While crying out in agony through clenched teeth, he stabbed through the chimera's neck, preventing it from biting down on him.

Unable to support himself as the creature's nails were digging further into his shoulder, he was pushed back.

「Grant us your full affection — “Restless Heavens!” “Binding Seal!”」

Kaori, seeing Kouki in trouble, promptly utilized a Recovery Magic. “Restless Heavens” was an Intermediate Rank Recovery Magic

aimed at a single target. It was more effective than “Restoration” which healed multiple people. However, with the chimera’s nails lodged in Kouki’s shoulders, it would be impossible to fully heal him.

Still, she simultaneously executed an Intermediate Rank Restraint Magic, “Binding Seal.” It was a magic which created a cage of light. Kaori had targeted Kouki, surrounding him in a cage of light, throwing the chimera back.

Because its claws were pulled out of Kouki’s shoulders, “Restless Heavens” demonstrated its full effect, healing Kouki’s wounds in an instant.

At the same time, some of the classmates in the rear were shooting magic toward the chimera attacking Kouki while others held off the turtle and other chimeras. With their distance and its visibility when moving, however, they could not deal a great amount of damage.

Still, Kouki had gained enough time to stand up. After readying the Holy Sword, he recited an aria and went on a counteroffensive.

「“Four Soaring Blade Wings!”」

Four arcs of light curved from the Holy Sword toward the chimeras, further strengthened by Kouki’s “Limit Break.” Each began to jump to dodge the attack. However, right then,

「“Bright Enveloping Chains!”」

Kaori’s specialized magic, “Bright Enveloping Chains,” activated. Chains of light came and bound them by their neck, foot, and body. Though the chimeras could easily break them, it was stopped for a moment.

As a result, four chimeras were hit by Kouki’s “Four Soaring Blade Wings” and died, scattering blood.

Kouki turned around and glared at the woman as he thrust his sword at her.

「Unfortunately, your last resort wasn’t enough to stop us. You have nothing left to defend you!」

The woman, hearing Kouki’s words, looked at him in amazement. She secretly wanted to ask 「Why are you saying that? Why not just stab me?」

Kouki, sure she was cornered, was irritated by her gaze. The first chimera, then the brutal demons, then the other

chimeras. They were all surprise attacks which annoyed him. He cried out 「Fight fairly, stop using surprise attacks while you just watch!」

「… It's not like I've a need to show you my trump card.」「Stop bluffing!」

「Well, I guess you are strong if you can knock them all back. I suppose I have confirmed the power of the "Apostle of

Heresy" to some extent, so I have no reason to stay here any longer.」

「What are you —」「Kyaaa!」

The woman, as if it were all a bother, brushed her hair aside. The moment Kouki asked a question, a scream sounded from behind.

Kouki instinctively looked back to see not just more brutal demons and chimeras, but black wolves with four eyes he had never seen before as well as a black cat, approximately 60 centimeters in length, with four tentacles on its back; Nomura Kentaro as well as Nagayama were pierced in the flank by the cat's tentacles.

「Kentaro! Shit, don't get carried away!」「Ayako, get a grip! I'll heal them!」

Seeing Nomura injured, Endo cut the black cat's tentackes with his dagger, aiming for a counterattack in his rage without hiding himself.

Nomura collapsed while crying in agony; Yoshino moved to heal him while scolding Endo. He regained his calm hearing her voice and chanted Recovery magic to heal the injury to his side.

「Wha, there's still so many!」

Looking behind, Kouki let loose a voice of astonishment as fresh forces arrived.

「The chimera's unique magic, "Camouflage," demonstrates its effect on things it touches. Didn't you think about that

possibility? Look, there's even more.」

「!?」

His friends were in a terrible position with the large number of demon reinforcements. Seeing this, Kouki turned back quickly. While giving away the secrets of the chimera's "Camouflage," the woman set the demons on them. From behind, many wolves and a black cat attacked Kouki all at once.

「Kuu, Ohhh!」

The black cat's tentacle extended at an extraordinary speed, attacking Kouki from all directions.

Kouki rotated his sword like a pinwheel, blocking the attack. The

cat pounced on Kouki to attack, to which he calmly cut horizontally. Because the black cat was in the air, it had no possibility of dodging.

Kouki screamed 「That's one!」 sure of its death.

But its next movement overturned his conviction. The black cat somersaulted in the air, avoiding Kouki's attack while aiming its own attack at Kouki's neck with sharp nails unsuitable to its physique.

Kouki barely managed to dodge its attack, but because of that, he could not respond to the wolf attacking him from behind. His injury caused him to lose his balance; it was a serious injury which surpassed even his defense during "Limit Break," an attack which would likely have blown him away under normal circumstances.

They were encircled by demons with a strength clearly deviating from the norm.

Kaori and Tsuji, both "Healers," were recovering their allies, as such, they were in a situation where neither side could strike a decisive blow.

Though Kouki tried to cut through the enemies with "Limit Break," he could not finish them off since the demons continually used a hit and away approach, the entire group cooperating as a single unit.

Shizuku's "Motionless" skill along with "Foresight" allowed her to predict the cooperative attack between the black cat and one of the wolves, allowing her to avoid a mortal wound.

「Not good… This is seriously not good!」「Shit, what do we do!」

Though they fought back desperately, the shadow of despair descended upon the class. Their feelings became stronger when the woman began to speak.

「Gold-eyed lizard who sleeps within the depths, Child of the

earth bearing the Emperor of Evil Eyes, Curse which pierces the dark future, Bring about an everlasting prison of darkness, Hold no despair or fear or disgrace, Your eyes will encroach upon all enemies, The everlasting, The cold statue which stands silent, Now, Break all and return to the earth! — “Fallen Prison!”」

Immediately after she completed this incantation, a gray globe appeared at her hand, drawing a parabola as it flew toward Kouki and the others.

It was slow. It was something they could evade. Though it did not seem like such a powerful magic, Nomura Kentaro, his abdomen run through by a tentacle, became anxious seeing it; his face turned further pale as he shouted.

「!? Not good! Taniguchi! Stop that! Set up a barrier!」

「Fue!? R, roger! Herein lies a sanctuary, Enemies of God will not pass, “Heavenly Severing!”」

Suzu utilized an Advance Rank Barrier Magic with a shortened incantation according to Nomura's instructions. The shining barrier wrapped around everyone present. Since "Heavenly Severing" did not have the function of choosing friend or foe, many of the demons were also included in the domed barrier.

"Heavenly Severing" was a strong magic with a large magic consumption. It was meaningless to use under normal circumstances; however, Nomura's shout indicated a danger from the magic the woman released; as such, she chose the strongest defensive magic she could use.

Immediately after Suzu erected "Heavenly Severing," the globe collided with the barrier. The gray orb released a terrific heat to surpass the barrier. Suzu desperately endured as she felt her magic being cut away.

Perhaps receiving instructions from the woman, the demons changed and began to aim at Suzu.

「Suzu!」

「Defend Taniguchi!」

The brutal demons shot magic as Eri called out Suzu's name and

rushed to defend her. Yoshiki Saito and Kondo Reiichi followed suit and protected Suzu following Nomura's orders.

However, Suzu could not move while maintaining "Heavenly Severing," and the black cat cut the distance short in an instant. Nomura created spears of stone from the ground, but the black cat

ran through the air in a zig-zag pattern as it released its tentacle.

「Taniguchi!」「Ah!?」

Though Nomura called out a warning to Suzu, he was slow.

The tentacle pierced through her thigh and belly and penetrated her right arm, causing her small body to fly away.

Suzu lost her breath as blood sprayed across the floor. As she regained her breath, she felt a sharp pain and screamed.

「Ahhhh!!」「Suzu-chan!」「Suzu!」

Kaori and Eri heard her cry in agony and called Suzu's name. Though Kaori focused her energy into her Recovery Magic, Suzu's barrier disappeared first.

「Everyone, get away from that sphere!」

Nomura warned them, his voice filled with frustration, but Suzu's magic, "Heavenly Severing," was the strongest defense they had. His warning was too late.

The barrier disappeared and the whirling sphere hit the ground, exploding without a sound. A gray smoke scattered violently.

Nomura and Suzu, who were struggling in pain, as well as Saito and Kondo who tried to run, were engulfed in the gray smoke. Not a single demon was present, since they took distance the moment the impact occurred.

The gray smoke extended, wrapping about Kouki and the others.
「Come, Wind! — “Wind Bomb!”」

Kouki forced the smoke away with a Wind Magic as he released a sudden gust of air.

Because the smoke was created with magic, it was not easy to

blow it away. Since Kouki’s magic was stronger through “Limit Break,” after some resistance, he succeeded in pushing the smoke away.

But once the smoke cleared…

「No, Suzu!」

「Nomura-kun!」「Saito! Kondo!」

Saito and Kondo were completely petrified and were now silent statues. Suzu’s lower half was petrified, and the left half of Nomura’s body was petrified as he covered Suzu.

Saito and Kondo were solidified with an expression that showed their confusion. Suzu, attacked by the pain of her lower body being petrified, lost consciousness.

On the other hand, though Nomura was the least injured despite protecting Suzu, he groaned as he bore with the pain.

The reason his injuries were light was because he had a natural talent for Earth Magic and, naturally, a high tolerance to it.

It was an Advance Rank Earth Magic, “Fallen Prison.” It was a troublesome magic which scattered a gray petrifying smoke. Touching even a little bit would lead to gradual petrifaction. In order to resist it, one would need Barrier Magic or blow the smoke away with a more powerful magic; however, as the magic itself was Advance Rank, only an Advance Rank Barrier Magic could defend against it.

「Bastard! How could you!」

Kouki was angry seeing his friends’ disastrous state. A bright light was emitted as Kouki further strengthened “Limit Break.” He was preparing himself to rush toward the female devil at any moment.

However, Shizuku raised her voice and admonished Kouki before issuing orders to retreat.

「Stop! Kouki! Withdraw! Clear a path out!」

「Wha!? What are you saying, you want to run away!」 Kouki was angry at his companions’ injuries, so he stared at

Shizuku and objected.

Though the pressure released from Kouki rained on Shizuku, she sternly looked at him and persuaded him.

「Listen! Kaori can definitely cure them. But it will take time. If we're slow with this, it might be too late. We need to get away and recover. Will you run out now when we're down three people? We won't last at this rate! We'll be annihilated!」

「Guu, but…」

「And won't "Limit Break" end soon? In this situation, where you're weaker than normal, we really won't be able to last! Calm down! We all feel the same way!」

Kouki, hearing his childhood friend's logical words, hesitated and bit his lips, but seeing Shizuku also biting down to the point of bleeding, his hot head cooled down.

She, too, was mortified. If possible, she wanted to charge into the enemy as well.

「Got it! Everyone, withdraw! Shizuku, Ryuutarou! Hold on just a bit longer!」

「Leave it to me!」 「Yeah!」

Kouki thrust his Holy Sword to the skies and chanted a long aria. Until now, he never used it because it took too long, and they had never reached a difficult situation; it was a magic meant for withdrawal.

However, he needed to entrust his body to Shizuku and Ryuutarou since he was essentially defenseless. The demons knew they should aim for Kouki. Naturally, they would need to defeat Shizuku and Ryuutarou who were desperately fighting them back, first.

「Do you think I would let you escape?」

While muttering this, the woman ordered a demon to cut off their path of retreat as she began to target Kouki with her own magic.

However, something unexpected happened to the woman.

「「「「「Gaaaa!!」」」」」

「!? Why!」

The chimeras were attacking the woman and her allies. She opened her eyes in astonishment and suddenly chanted a short spell, creating a high density blade of grit which attacked two of the oncoming chimeras. The rest evaded it.

The woman cried out 「Why me!?」and stared at the chimeras. Then she noticed it. Many of them had parts of their bodies destroyed. There was even a headless chimera.

「They're…」

The woman noticed immediately; they were the chimeras which had been cut down by Kouki. Dead creatures stood up. At that time, the woman recalled a certain magic and muttered to herself, 「It can't be…」

「I won't allow you to stop Kouki-kun!」

Eri used her hand like a baton and ordered the chimeras to surround the woman.

「Tch! A Necromancer! I didn't hear about this!」

The woman had carried out a quick investigation on Kouki and the others and waited for them to descend. As such, she did not hear of a practitioner of the super high difficulty magic known as Necromancy.

Eri, though a "Necromancer," had never used it in battle before since she was weak minded when it came to such things.

Eri had now overcome it and stared at the woman with a strong will in her eyes. She skillfully manipulated the chimeras; rather than aiming to defeat the woman, Eri was aiming to buy time.

「Suzu-chan, do your best! I'll definitely cure you!」

Kaori used "Focus" and "All Encompassing World" on Suzu. She decided Suzu was in the most dangerous situation and

focused everything on curing her first. "All Encompassing World" was a magic which removed status abnormalities and was an Intermediate Rank Recovery Magic.

However, for powerful petrifaction like this, it was slow. Furthermore, Suzu had a hole in her abdomen and her arm, and, though it was closed immediately, the quantity of blood lost was large. She was in a serious situation, and once the

petrifaction was resolved, the hole in her leg would need closing.

Nomura, whose left side was petrified, was being healed by Tsuji Ayako. Ayako's diligent healing along with Nomura's resistance to Earth Magic meant he healed at a quick rate. The petrifaction of his leg was quickly resolved.

Even so, she looked at Kaori who held her white staff and bit her lip. Despite being the same "Healer," Kaori was obviously above her in ability.

Kaori was restoring Suzu while simultaneously healing her. Kaori was also the one who was healing Shizuku and Ryuutarou who were defending Kouki. Furthermore, she was able to use "Bright Enveloping Chains" during battle. This ability to utilize multiple magics at one time was something Tsuji was unable to mimic.

(Shirasaki-san… is amazing. In comparison, I… now isn't the time for this!)

Tsuji was mortified that she could not heal her friends to perfection at this time.

She desperately bit her lips in frustration; Nomura seemed to want to say something, but now was not the time, so he bore with the pain and began chanting.

With Kouki injured, their battle potential had drastically fallen;

Hiyama and Nakano who were confronting numerous demons were covered in wounds. Nagayama and Eri were defending the two Healers, approaching their limits. They would not last more than a few minutes at this rate.

Seeing no light gather on Kouki's Holy Sword, Nakano seemed to panic and was about to take suicidal action.

At that time, the moment everyone was waiting for arrived…

「Here we go! — "Heaven's Rainfall!"」

From the Holy Sword came a flash of light. The light hit the ceiling, causing it to explode, the rocks raining down like meteors.

"Heaven's Rainfall" was a Light Magic which was targeted above

the enemy. It had a high amount of power distributed over a wide area. Originally, it was used to clear up small fry, but with "Limit Break," It was like a bomb which could destroy even demons of the 50th floor.

However, these demons were of abnormal strength, so it did little damage to them. At most, it separated them from the students.

However, for Kouki, this was enough. It created a chance for them to withdraw.

As for the woman, she was still dealing with the chimeras Eri was manipulating.

When Kouki confirmed this, he ended the powerful magic with a short incantation.

「— “Converge!”」

A rain of light fell from the heavens, forcing the demons to temporarily retreat. This spectacle looked like a meteor shower. While the meteors were falling,

Kouki thrust his Holy Sword, bathed in light, toward the demon blocking their path to retreat.

「— “Sky Claw Storm!”」

A bombardment of shooting stars was released from the tip. It did not reach the strength of his trump card, “Heaven’s Might,” which was Kouki’s last resort, but it managed to sweep away the demons blocking their retreat.

Normally, he was not prone to use “Heaven’s Might,” since it took time to cast and required Shizuku and Ryuutarou to shield him.

Still, “Sky Claw Storm” was the best attack he could use in the current situation.

The torrent of light caused countless explosions, like a cluster bomb, forcing the demons blocking their path to be blown

away.

「「「「Ruaaa!!」」」」

The demons screamed with their eyes shut tight.

A side effect of “Sky Claw Storm” was a flash effect. The demons rioted about blindly in confusion.

They were no longer blocking the class. The way out was now open.

「Now! Retreat!」

Upon Kouki’s order, everyone moved at once. Kondo and Saito, still petrified, were carried by Nagayama over his shoulders while Endo carried Suzu who had fainted. Nomura, though his arm was still petrified, stood up on his own and bore with the pain.

「Tch! Don’t let them go! Everyone, attack at once!」

The woman, while dealing with the remaining two chimeras, ordered the other demons. They moved as instructed and faithfully pursued the class. This group included many swift demons such as the chimeras, wolves, and the black cats. They would shorten the distance quickly.

At that time, Nomura turned around with a fearless smile and thrust his right hand forward.

「I won’t stand by and lose when it comes to Earth Magic! I’ll return it right at you! “Fallen Prison!”」

The same gray sphere the woman created was in Nomura’s hand. The magic ball made of petrifying smoke moved toward the

oncoming demons. When “Fallen Prison” was activated by the

woman a short time ago, despite no instructions being given, the demons took distance. Perhaps they had an instinctual fear of this magic. With this thought, Nomura chanted the same magic in preparation for their withdrawal.

Nomura's guess was correct. The moment he released the gray sphere, the demons stopped all at once and took distance. At that time, the smoke acted as a cover for Kouki and the others as they withdrew.

On top of that, Endo erased signs of their presence such as odor and other signs using magic. Endo was an "Assassin," and he had a natural talent for such magic.

Through the passage, the scream of angry demons was audible. Kouki and the others felt half regret and half joy in their survival.

With few words, they continued to run.

Chapter 3

In a room at the end of Floor 89.

Though there were four entrances in the octagonal room which advanced further in, only two entrances were visible; all the paths on the other side led to other safe rooms. The entrances were camouflaged well, the room itself was about ten mats in size.

There, Kouki and the others were lying about as they rested in their own way, but they had a uniform, dark expression. They were looking down in a deep depression. There were many wounded, but their expressions were not those distorted in pain.

Normally, Kouki would encourage them all to get past this strong feeling of worthlessness, but he had sunk in silence as he leaned against the back wall with the side effects of “Limit Break” assaulting him.

At this time, the mood maker of the class, who always had trouble reading the air in a good way, was pale, her face knit in pain, as she breathed deeply. This was also one of the reasons everyone was looking down.

The lower half of Suzu’s body was still petrified, so Kaori continued treating her.

Her thigh, which had been pierced through, was already completely recovered. All that remained was to release the petrifaction. Unfortunately, Suzu had been hit by the tentacle and lost a large amount of blood. An important vessel may have been hit. Most likely, Kaori’s treatment was just in time.

But even Kaori could not replenish the lost blood. Blood transfusions were a limited technology in this world, too. Suzu’s condition would only improve with rest.

Kaori, because she spent all her time on Suzu, had not yet treated the others. Naturally, Kondo and Saito, who were completely

petrified, were left as is. Everyone present understood they

would be treated next, so no one complained. It was possible they simply lacked the energy, too.

Shizuku had wrinkles in her forehead from the heavy air in the room as she thought about how to encourage everyone.

Originally, Shizuku was silent and softened Suzu's personality. She was poor at these things. However, with Kouki weakened by "Limit Break," and their earlier defeat, she needed to do something. It was a merit of hers to naturally care for others; she really was a compassionate person.

Shizuku was physically and mentally at her limit.

When she was resolute to meet her comedic death with a poor joke, Nomura and Tsuji Ayako began talking in the back.

「Fuu, I think I managed to camouflage us well. Since I'm not used to doing delicate work… I'm at my limit already.」

「I don't think there's a sense of incompatibility with any other part of the wall… and you constructed it quickly. Thanks for the hard work.」

「You, too, it's hard work healing petrifaction, right? Good work.」
Kentaro Nomura was adept at "Earth Magic" and camouflaged the entrances with walls of stone.

Though "Earth Magicians" had a high aptitude for this type of magic, they could not perform delicate tasks like a "Transmuter." For instance, he could cause the ground to explode and rocks to go flying, and he could even focus them into spears or control a high-ranking golem, but he could not handle separating and combining various minerals.

Though a hole could easily be made through this wall, Nomura had constructed the wall to have the same "form" as the surrounding stone.

Now, Tsuji Ayako was treating Nomura's petrifaction.

「Good work, Nomura-kun. It should take only a little longer now.」

「… It's fine. I only need to take time to completely recover. As for Kousuke… we can only pray for him.」

「… Kousuke will be fine. He's second to none in the thinness of his existence.」

「He'd be sad if he heard that…」

In this dark air which had softened slightly, Shizuku kindly consoled Nomura with surprisingly black words.

On the other hand, Nomura smiled bitterly as he prayed for his friend who was not here.

Right now, Endo Kousuke was in a place with no companions. Endo alone parted from his companions to go tell Commander Meld the entire situation. Normally, it would be suicidal to

take solo action as deep as they were, even for the summoned. The entire group were able to manage to get here only because they had 15 people.

However, Endo went alone, running the entire course by himself. He was not particularly a poor talker, nor was he dark, and it was not like people forgot about his existence; he was a very

normal high school boy who could speak candidly with others. It was simply that people lost sight of him. 「Eh? Where did he go?」 they would say as they looked about their surroundings. This

elusive skill was not something he did on purpose; Endo had always been that way, even on Earth. He could take pride in the “thinness of his existence.”

He could take full advantage of his “Conceal” ability to not be found by demons and reach Floor 70 where Commander Meld was.

In fact, after he had awoken to this skill and magic in this world, the thinness of Endo’s existence was further polished. It had reached a degree where even the demons in a Great Labyrinth would overlook him.

Thinking this, Kouki and the others sent him off. When they separated, Endo had watery eyes…

He felt terrible withdrawing alone while leaving his companions. However, he was persuaded when he was told, 「Even demons with good senses won’t notice your existence. You alone won’t be defeated. I’m sure you can get there without being

noticed.」

Kouki and the others wanted to withdraw to shallower levels immediately; however, they did not have the strength to spare, and everyone was covered in injuries; furthermore, Kouki was weakened and they would not be able to handle the levels below Floor 80.

Naturally, they did not think Meld would come to their rescue. The party of six he was in could only maintain a safe area, even as

a group of powerful soldiers and adventurers, in the latter half of the 70s, and that was ignoring any possible safety margin. He would not reach them. The only ones who could pass through the 80s would be Kouki's group.

In short, Endo was not sent out to call for help but to pass on information about the demons being led by a devil.

Kouki and the others had heard many times from Ishtar about the teachings of the Saint Church and the Devils, and though he heard there were methods by which a devil could brainwash other creatures, they had never heard of or seen one with a clear intent, nor did they hear about such powerful demons. What was amazing was not the strength but the "number."

Nevertheless, the woman commanded powerful demons, and they were able to overwhelm Kouki and the others who had cheat specs as they advanced through the unexplored territories of 【Orcus Great Labyrinth.】Honestly, if the Devils had attacked earlier, mankind could easily have been annihilated.

In short, Ishtar's information was not wrong; the Devils which led demons were indeed "strong."

But they now also had "numbers." The students judged this information needed to be passed on no matter what.

「Shirasaki-san, I will leave Kondo-kun and Saito-kun to you since it takes too much time. I will take care of everyone else in the meantime.」

「Yeah, got it. Don't do too much Tsuji-san.」

「It's fine, it's fine. I'm fine… sorry, if I could do more, your burden

would decrease…」

Ayako spoke to Kaori while healing Nomura.

Though they were both "Healers," Ayako was largely inferior to Kaori. Though she pretended it was nothing on the surface, she felt miserable and apologized deeply to Kaori in her mind.

「Of course not,」 Kaori responded. The darkness disappeared from their companions' faces as they were healed.

Though Nomura gazed at Tsuji and wanted to say something to her, it would be an obstacle to the treatment itself, so he remained silent.

「… In a situation like this, tell me if you need anything.」 「… Quiet.」

Nagayama, though he said this to Nomura with an interested expression, the person in question simply looked away and sulked.

After that, for many hours, they were healed little by little as they took naps in turns.

On the other hand, Endo Kousuke, who was entrusted with withdrawing and passing on information on the Devils, aimed for Floor 70 where Meld's group was without fighting. He advanced steadily.

If the demons noticed on the 80s, he would be in a one-on-one situation. For that reason, he went as quickly as he could while remaining careful. Right now, he saw a demon pass right before him.

After the demon disappeared, Endo jumped off the ceiling and pressed his entire body to the wall. Most likely, if he had attacked the demon, he could have used a surprise attack from the ceiling and dealt massive damage.

He secretly thought 「… If it senses me even a little bit… 」but, luckily, that was not the case.

「If I don't hurry… 」

Endo understood the role he was tasked with. He was also told,

along with passing along information, by Nagayama and Nomura, 「Don't return. 」

But once he fulfilled his role, Endo would return. He would not feel

right if he alone returned safely.

Endo simply followed the return route he drilled into his head and finally reached Floor 70.

He suppressed his feelings as he headed to the teleportation formation where Meld and the knights were. After a while, Endo perceived their presences. Since he resolved his hiding skills, the other side should have noticed him.

When Endo turned the last corner, he saw Meld, but even after revealing himself, he was not noticed.

Endo approached with eyes like a dead fish and spoke.
「Commander! It's me!」

「Uo!? What is this!? An attack!?」

The moment Endo raised his voice, he jumped back and pulled out his sword. Everyone looked about in caution and prepared to fight.

「It's me! Seriously, give me a break!」

「Eh? Kousuke, huh? Don't surprise me. What about everyone else? Are you alone?」

「That's what I need to tell you!」

Understanding that Endo was there, since they understood the

thinness of his existence, they relaxed.

However, Endo arrived earlier than expected and alone, furthermore, he was covered in wounds; they had stern expressions.

Endo soberly recounted everything he could remember while speaking rapidly.

At first, the knights looked at him suspiciously, but as his story advanced, they only grew more anxious.

Meld patted Endo who was in tears.

「Don't cry, Kousuke. You did a job only you could do. Who else could run through 20 levels without fighting in such a short amount of time?」

「Commander… I, I'm going back. They let me go alone… we lost…

We couldn't win, even with "Limit Break." We could only run away… even if they're fully healed… if they're attacked, there's no telling what will happen… please, go ahead and tell everyone.」

He was crying with a resolute expression.

Meld bit his lip in frustration and handed all the powerful recovery items in his bag to Endo. The other members did the same.

「Sorry, Kousuke. I wish I could help you… but this is all we have…」

「Ah, no don't worry. Even this much is a life safer.」

Endo smiled while shaking the bag full of medicines. Meld's expression steepened further, his face clearly bitter.

「… Kousuke. I will now say something extremely low. I don't care if you hate me, that much is natural. Still, you must listen.」

「Eh? What are you talking about…」

「… No matter what, take "Kouki" and return here.」「Eh?」

Meld's words bewildered Endo.

「Kousuke. If the demons were strong enough to force you into this situation… mankind won't survive without Kouki. Of course, I want to believe in everyone, believe that I will meet you all again… but I must say this as the leader of the knights of the Kingdom. In an emergency, we must make the best use

of "Kouki."」「…」

At last, Endo, understanding Meld's words, looked dumbfounded. In short, Meld was talking about "sacrificing" everyone for a

single person. Endo looked dark. 「… Are we just extras?」

「Of course not. I want everyone to live. No, I can't express it

properly… but still, Kousuke, I want you to tell these words to

Shizuku and Ryuutarou at least.」「…」

Endo felt stagnant emotions hearing Meld's words.

The time they spent together was long and close; they had been side by side since the time when the class did not know left from right, and they had fought together for a long time. Meld was like a big brother to them. He was someone they trusted more than any other in this world.

Because of this, Endo felt a sense of betrayal having heard words that cast them aside.

Still, he understood what Meld said was something that needed to be done. Endo simply bowed his head in assent.

However, at that moment…

「Kousuke!?」「Eh!?」

Meld suddenly pushed Kousuke away, then the sound of metal was heard as he brandished sword in hand and spun around.

Doga! With this sound, he was blown away and countless scratch marks were carved into the earth.

Endo turned pale as he looked to the side. 「N, no. They already caught up… 」

As if his words were a signal, demons showed up one after another.

Endo shook them off, but they had quickly caught up. He had erased all traces of his existence as he moved. The woman was looking for Kouki and the others, it was impossible for her to have caught up with Endo who ran straight here.

Endo's doubts were erased by the woman's words.

「Tch, just one person… I thought they would come here first… I guess they hid themselves somewhere. 」

While playing with her hair in irritation, the devil got on a wolf's back. Meld and the knights prepared to fight.

Judging from her words, she thought the class would run straight here and so came without searching. With her expectations not met, she was irritated that she now had to search for them.

At the same time, that meant Kouki and the others were safe;

Endo felt a little relieved. Aware of this, the woman sneered at Endo.

「Well, I suppose I have that to take care of… I guess I'll kill you all quickly and get on with it. 」

The demons attacked all at once.

The chimeras rushed forward, shaking space, the black cat ran like a gale, while the brutal demons approached with large mace in hand.

「Circle formation. Protect the teleporter to the end! Kousuke,

please, stand up… run! To above ground!」「Eh!?」

Meld and the knights were the pinnacle of the Kingdom's soldiers. From Endo's story, he clearly knew they were no match, so he decided to stick to defense.

Endo doubted Meld who said「Run to above ground.」They could run away together; if they escaped, the enemy would turn away to search for the class.

「Don't just sit there! Tell everyone above ground about the demons!」

「B, but…」

「We… will die here! Kousuke! We need to destroy the teleporter on the other side! Buy as much time as you can!」

「N, no…!」

Meld's thoughts were clear.

Even if he ran to the ground, demons would teleport after him, and

he would not be able to scatter his pursuers, leading to his chances of death while escaping to rise drastically.

For that reason, Meld decided to let a single person to go while everyone else remained. If they could buy time, Endo would be able to destroy the teleporter on the 30th floor, and the pursuers would lose him. The teleporter was carved into the ground, and once destroyed, it could only be easily repaired with “Transmute.” Endo needed to escape and tell the ground forces what happened. They only need someone to “Transmutate” the ground to let Kouki use it again.

The one who was chosen to go was Endo.

A moment ago, Meld said words which cast aside everyone but Kouki, so Endo could not immediately react.

Meld screamed words from the bottom of his heart as battle began.

「I’m sorry, I’m powerless! I’m sorry I can’t help you! I’m sorry this is the only way! Kousuke! This is my final wish! Please listen!」

Endo reacted to the words of the man he felt was like a big brother.

「Live!」

Endo understood his words.

Meld did not want Endo and the others to die. He simply needed to efficiently use them as best he could. Kouki was the strongest of the class which was why he was picked. He must have been incredibly bitter when he had to choose the “sacrifices.”

Endo bit his lips as he ran toward the teleporter. He needed to respond to Meld’s resolution.

「I won’t let you!」

The woman released a magic as well as dispatched the black cat. The black cat shot a tentacle like a bullet, which was followed by a stone spear filled with murderous intent.

Endo cut away the tentacle with his short sword, but he twisted his body and could not avoid the spear. The attacks were made at odd angles, as if predicting how he would react.

Endo clenched his teeth and prepared for the impact. Even if he was hit, he would jump through the teleporter and continue running.

However, the impact did not occur. One of the knights ran from the circle and used his body as a shield to protect Endo.

「A, Alan-san!」

「Gufu… Hurry up and go!」

With the stone spear in his abdomen, the man known as Alan readied his sword toward the incoming demons, a smile on his face. Endo bit his lips again and ran.

「Tch! Damn small fry! Everyone, attack the boy!」

The woman gave an order in haste … but she was too late. 「Hah! This is our win! Don't mock knights of the Hairihi

Kingdom!」

Meld smiled fearlessly as Endo teleported.

The woman ignored Meld and gave an order to the demons. Since they could manipulate magic directly, there was no need to chant. But,

「I told you not to look down on us!」

The knights used their skill and technique which Kouki and the others still lacked to hinder the demons. Though outnumbered, their ability to defend this long was praiseworthy.

Still, the strength and number of demons overwhelmed their frantic efforts. Alan, with a stone spear in his abdomen, was exhausted and fell to his knee. The chimera surpassed his defense and reached the teleporter.

As soon as the chimera disappeared, the teleporter lost its brightness.

「Ku, one got through… Kousuke… don't die.」

Meld's words reached no one as the woman ordered the demons to capture Endo.

「Hmph。Let's go on a rampage at this moment of our death.

Show them the power of the knights of Hairihi Kingdom!」

「「「「「Yeah!」」」」」

The subordinates shouted loudly. Even if only for a moment, the demons flinched.

… After that…

Silence returned to the teleporter room on the 70th floor.

「Uwaaa!!」

While screaming, Endo, who ran out of the teleporter on the 30th floor of 【Orcus Great Labyrinth,】raised his sword and immediately tried to destroy the teleporter.

「Wh, what!? You! What are you doing!」「Stop!」

「Stop him!」

The boy dressed in black appeared from the teleporter and began attacking it with his sword. The surrounding knights, after a moment of surprise, jumped on Endo.

Their role was to protect the teleporter. Due to a personnel shortage, Floor 30 was the limit of their abilities.

Endo could not destroy the teleporter in a single blow. Two hits, three hits, still, he barely scratched it.

「L, let go! Hurry, if you don't destroy it! The enemy! They'll come through!」

「Y, you're a Hero, aren't you!? Why are you…」

The person they saw was acting in a frenzy, but they all understood he was one of the Heroes. They instinctively let go. At that chance, Endo ran to destroy the magic formation, but he was one step too slow.

The teleporter shined. A moment later, the area shook as something attacked Endo.

「Shit!」

「What is that! Guaaaa!!」

Endo evaded the attack by jumping back; however, a nearby knight was killed as they received a blow from the chimera's claws.

Everyone shook seeing one of their comrades killed in an instant. Endo shouted in desperation.

「It's an enemy! Take care of the distorted space! If you don't destroy the magic formation, they'll come out fast!」

Hearing Endo's voice, the knights regained their thoughts; however, one more person was blown away.

Two of the seven people defending the teleporter were already dead.

Endo used the “Assassin” skill, “Wall Run” to run along the ceiling so he could get behind the chimera to attack the teleporter, but the chimera noticed him and tried attacking him as he

jumped.

「Shit, what’s with this monster!」

Though no one knew what was going on, the remaining knights jumped at the chimera, understanding what Endo was doing.

However, they could only see the space where the chimera swung, naturally, they did not know what kind of attack was coming their way. Even the person who was attacking from behind, cutting at the snake tail, was thrown aside by the creature’s wing.

Still, their actions were not useless, since the chimera was forced off balance. Endo was able to exchange blows when the situation was dire. He could not evade them completely, though, and his shoulder was torn away.

The chimera used its wings to regain balance and landed on the ground. Endo got up immediately and aimed at the teleporter.

The chimera tried to kill Endo before that happened, but Endo’s short sword was already thrust deep into the magic formation, destroying it completely.

「This is… Gaaaaaaaaa!!!」

He had succeeded in destroying the magic formation, but the chimera's fang had pierced his right arm the next moment. He cried out in pain as the chimera tried to tear his arm away.

「Like hell I'd let you!」「Let go of him!」

Some knights used their bodies to hinder its attack while others attacked its side with their spears.

When its jaws loosened, Endo removed his right arm and gouged out the chimera's eyes with a knife he hid in his left sleeve.

The raging chimera tore apart two nearby knights. Endo threw another knife at the chimera, but it dodged with wild instinct.

Immediately after that, one of the knights screamed and fell to the ground as the snake bit into his neck.

The knight writhed in pain as he turned purple; he died quickly.
「Damn it!」

It was a fatal mistake. The final knight ran away seeing the snake

killing his comrade. The chimera noticed the enemy turn his back to it and immediately tried to attack him. Endo, despite being covered in wounds, squeezed out the last of his strength to cut the chimera's neck as it attacked the man.

「Diiieeee!!」

He was torn away from his companions, forced to desert Meld and the others, and saw many of his acquaintances die. His shout and attack were filled with his grudges, demonstrating its full effect. The chimera's neck was torn through, killing it in an instant.

Endo was sent flying as the creature died and rolled along the ground.

While enduring the pain in his right arm and shoulder, Endo lifted his body up with his left arm and confirmed the chimera's death.

He used "Conceal" to hide himself as he approached the chimera and cut its neck to ensure its death. Even so, Endo looked like he would cry. 「Damn it!」he cried out.

He looked at the last knight.

He was lying prone. His right hand gripped his sword, and his face was purple. A snake was split nearby. Perhaps, immediately before he was attacked by the chimera, he tore up the snake nearby, but he had received its venom.

In the end, the knights guarding Floor 30 were annihilated. 「Damn

it!」Endo cried out many times in tears.

Endo continued for a while; at this rate, he would bleed to death, so he took out the high grade salves and recovery medicines which he received from Commander Meld. He performed emergency care on his wounds and placed the knights' corpses in the corner silently.

For a while, Endo watched them, then he turned around slowly and aimed for above ground. His eyes were hollow.

— Again, only I survived.

This thought caused Endo's mind to tighten as if enveloped by cold chains. He did nothing but move his body mechanically,

performing the role entrusted to him, single-mindedly aiming toward the ground.

Chapter 4

「Hyahaa!」

“Brise” and the “Stiefe” drove side by side through a beautiful meadow with the sun to their backs as they traveled out of 【Raisen Gorge,】creating a storm of dust behind them.

Stiefe was running back and forth happily as they advanced.

「… Shea is in a good mood. She’s shouting like it’s the end of the century.」

「… Mu. I want to try it for a bit.」

In the driver’s seat of Brise, Hajime gripped the steering wheel with one hand while placing his other elbow on the window as he muttered in amazement. As Hajime said, Shea was driving alone on Stiefe.

Shea, originally, enjoyed the feeling of the wind cutting by on Stiefe. With the number of traveling companions increasing, they were forced to use Brise primarily, but she was dissatisfied with it.

Though she could feel the wind by putting her head out the window, she was not happy, and, because the seat next to Hajime was reserved for Yue, she could not stick to him like she did on the bike. As such, she begged Hajime to teach her how to operate it.

Since magic drove Stiefe, it was easy to handle so long as one had a grasp of magic manipulation. Given the circumstances, it was even possible to control it without holding the handlebars; Shea picked it up quickly, and the sight of it all had its own charm.

Now she was screaming out in a queer voice while shifting left and right, performing drifts and wheelies as well as tricks like a jack knife and back ride which would put the professionals to shame.

Though it was easier to control here than on the earth… she was

already almost as good as Hajime at riding it.

Shea was crying 「Hey hey!」impudently as her rabbit ears fluttered in the wind. To say the least, Hajime felt somewhat sober. Occasionally, there would be a person whose personality changes completely once in a vehicle, and Shea seemed to belong to that sort.

Yue looked similar to Shea to Hajime, as if she also wanted to do that. When thinking of Yue going 「Hyaha!」Hajime decided he would stop because he fould feel extremely awful.

Yue put her head out the window, feeling the pleasant wind, while the little girl, Myuu, climbed on her knees with stars in her eyes. She began pleading with Hajime when she saw Shea steering the vehicle with her hands while doing a handstand.

「Papa! Papa! Myuu wants to do that, too!」

「Give it up.」

Myuu began to complain, 「No! Myuu wants to too!」when Hajime quickly denied her.

Myuu thrashed about, and so that she wouldn't fall off her seat, Yue closely hugged her from behind and scolded her. When she went 「Uu～」with a cute moan, Hajime had a look of reluctance.

「Myuu. I'll ride with you later, so hold on until then.」「Fue? Is that okay?」

「Yeah. Though I will never let you ride with Shea… I'm fine if it's with me.」

「Shea Onee-chan is no good?」

「Yeah. She's definitely no good. Look at her. She's doing some weird pose while steering… I definitely won't let you ride with

someone who drives so dangerously.」

Shea was now standing on the handlebars and posing with her arms crossed while laughing.

Shea struck a pose, to which Hajime put Myuu in a position where she could not see.

「To begin with, it's a little dangerous. I'll need to make a child's seat for it sometime… Hmph.」

「Yue Onee-chan. Papa grunted. He's weird.」

「… Hajime-Papa is worried about Myuu… He's unexpectedly overprotective.」

「Fu fu, so Master hides evil passions for even a child? This gap is big… Haa, haa.」

「Yue Onee-chan, Tio Onee-chan is going Haa, Haa.」

「… It's due to an incurable disease. Don't worry about it.」 While patting Myuu's head who looked up at Yue from her knees,

Yue served as Myuu's conversation partner.

Though Myuu had only been traveling with them for a short time, Hajime had already given up on escaping from the nickname,
「Papa.」

At first, he did everything he could to stop her, but she began to cry every time and said 「Do you hate me?」as she silently appealed to him with wet eyes. Though Hajime could kill even the demons in the Abyss, he did not think he would ever win against Yue or Myuu. In the end, he became 「Papa.」

Hajime allowed this at last. Now he seemed to be overprotective. Shea was a shameless rabbit and Tio was abnormal, and, when thinking about defending Myuu until she was reunited with her mother, he put himself out too much. In that aspect, Yue was the most sensible amongst them.

Myuu stuck closely between Hajime and Yue. Though Yue could not flirt with him now, giving her a sense of frustration, since Myuu was cute, she let it go.

In the back seat, Tio could be heard going Haa, Haa. Yue covered Myuu's ears because it was bad for her growth.

Meanwhile, Hajime was muttering about how he would need to make a seat for her. Like this, they steadily advanced.

They continued down the highway. Hajime and the girls finally reached【Post Town Horuad.】

Though they originally intended to pass by, Iruwa, the head of the Fyuren Guild Branch, asked him to stop by. They originally intended to go to【Guryuen Desert】first, so it would normally have taken some time regardless, so there was no rush.

Hajime squinted as he walked down the main street toward the Horuad Adventurer Guild. He carried Myuu on his shoulders. Peshi peshi, people watched as they saw her hit Hajime's head with her small palms, a curious expression on her face.

「Papa? What's wrong?」

「Hm? Ah～ no, I've been here before… It's only been 4 months, but it feels like 4 years have already passed.」

「… Hajime, okay?」

Yue had a complex expression as she hooked her arm around his and looked at him anxiously. Hajime shrugged and returned to his typical self.

「Yeah, no question about it. I guess I was indulging in some nostalgia. Thinking about it, everything started here… The night I spent in tension, fear, and desperation, then we went to

the Labyrinth the next day… and I fell.」「…」

Recalling that fateful day, Hajime began to speak to himself. Yue, sensing the serious atmosphere, quietly watched Hajime. Tio asked Hajime in interest.

「Right. Master, would you like to redo it all? Would you like to stay with your companions? I heard a little about your

circumstances… but would you want to be with everyone else? You might have had a good time, right? 」

Tio, because her relationship with the others was still shallow, often spoke her mind; rather, she was quite straightforward.

Speaking objectively, she spoke her mind without thinking. She wanted to be their companion, and, though she was quite a pervert which made it difficult for them, she still wanted to be with them.

Tio's words were not said with ill intent.

As such, Hajime suddenly recalled that midnight when he was looking at the moonlight. The unsavory tea, his friend in a white negligee, her black hair which reflected the moonlight as she promised to protect him; to the end, she reached out to him.

Suddenly, Hajime returned to the present when he felt a hand touching his arm. Hajime looked down at Yue who looked at him strongly. Her hand was tightly grasping his sleeve.

Hajime matched Yue's gaze and smiled softly.

「 Certainly, that could have happened… but even if I could return to that day, I would travel this same path, no matter how many times I was given that option. 」

「 Hoo, why? 」

Seeing Hajime, she naturally understood why, but Tio decided to

ask regardless.

Hajime, without looking away from Yue, gently grasped her hand. Her face went slightly red.

「Of course… Because I would want to meet Yue.」「Hajime…」

Since 【Post Town Horuad】was a town near 【Orcus Great Labyrinth,】it was a town filled with adventurers and mercenaries. Soldiers around the country gathered here. The town was always busy; naturally, along a main street, that activity was even higher than average.

Many people watched as Hajime and Yue stopped walking in the middle of the main street.

They had entered their own world while staring into each others eyes, exuding an atmosphere as if they were about to kiss at any moment. Many gazes (both curiosity and envy) were pointed at them. Still, Hajime and Yue could only see each other.

「Tio-san, you heard, right? He didn't say "all of you," right? He only said Yue-san. And they went into their own world again. They don't care about the place or the situation anymore. All we can do is look from the side, right? I want to experience that, I even passed through the phase where they treated me like a shameless character… no, can you understand? Yue-san is special. I want that feeling too, but now we can suffer together. Yue-san is special, so naturally we're together. Hajime-san won't ignore her. But, you know, Hajime-san has

been showing his dere side recently, I'm slowly climbing the stairs to adulthood! Even if Yue-san is special, he's paying some attention to me, right? This useless man, I want him to act cozy with me. I want to do this and that on the bed. I want him to play hard with me like he does with Yue-san. Tio-san, it's fine to think that, right!?」

「Sh, Shea. I understand your resentment, but calm down. We're attracting enough attention with Master acting like that. Rather, I just want him to treat me badly… in a public place…

Haa, haa, all those cold gazes… Haa, haa, Nnn!」

A beauty panted in the middle of the street while a girl with rabbit ears cried out about wanting to do erotic things, the curious onlookers began to back away.

「Papa～ Shea Onee-chan and Tio Onee-chan are…」「Myuu. That's no good. Pretend you don't see them.」「… Shea… Hajime is lumping you with Tio…」

Hajime and Yue, hearing Shea's shout, regained their senses, and were now vacantly staring at the two.

Though Yue muttered in fright, Hajime did not hear her. He was busy worrying about the future with his odd companions.

In the distance, guards heard the commotion and began to see what was going on. Hajime and the others left, reluctantly dragging Shea and Tio by their necks.

He was always surrounded by beautiful women and gazes of envy… Only at a time like this did people look at him in sympathy.

While ignoring the surrounding gazes, they finally reached the Horuad branch of the Adventurer Guild.

With Myuu on his back as usual, Hajime opened the door. Unlike guilds in other towns, the door here was made of metal. It released a gloomy sound and was a signal to the people inside.

Last time, when Hajime was in Horuad, he did not have any free time and was looking for the essentials… so this was the first time he entered the Adventurer Guild here which held a heavy atmosphere.

The walls and floors had marks which showed they were broken and roughly repaired. Mud stuck to various places, giving it an unclean appearance. On the left side of the front counter was a restaurant; however, it typically served alcohol, unlike most other branches, and there were people who were sitting there, drinking during the day.

There were seats on the second floor, with many adventurers looking down over the handrails. Generally, the ones above had a strong atmosphere. It was an unspoken rule, so high ranking adventurers tended to gravitate up there.

The atmosphere here was different as well. Everyone looked at him without any of the heart-warming gazes like in Brook. This place was filled with the spirit of those who had experienced combat with demons. They entered the Labyrinth as if it were natural.

However, atmosphere aside, this place was no different from others. It was simply a place where adventurers who typically had longer careers gathered.

The moment Hajime set foot in the building, the adventurers looked at him.

Myuu, noticing the gaze from atop Hajime, went 「Hyuu!」 and clung tightly to his head.

The adventurers had a wild excitement seeing Hajime surrounded by beauties while carrying a little girl.

Myuu trembled more and more. Hajime pulled her down and carried her in his right arm. Myuu buried her face in his chest, completely shutting out the outside world.

Some of the adventurers, obviously drunk, began standing from their chairs. Their eyes clearly said 「Let's beat down this brat.」 The atmosphere filling the guild hall clearly showed signs of harassment mixed with jealousy.

Though there was the possibility that Hajime was a client… that thought no longer passed through their mind. Rather than talk, some of the rougher crowd took a step forward with the intent to start a fight.

However, Hajime had become an overprotective Papa recently, and

he could not ignore the girl's remark that she was frightened. Though he had a vein clearly appearing on his head, Hajime gently lifted Myuu up and calmed her down with a kind gaze.

And then, Don!! A loud sound spread as every adventurer was hit with a massive pressure.

Any adventurer staring at Hajime was affected. The wild excitement present a moment ago was but a child's temper tantrum against this thirst for blood. Many of the Adventurers were already lacking the strength to stand, while some of the immature adventurers were about to lose consciousness. Everyone that stood was forced to sit down.

Those who remained conscious when receiving Hajime's "Overpower" and "Magic Radiation" desperately supported their body while trembling, sweat flooding down their pale faces.

This sensation which felt like an eternity soon weakened. The adventurers took a deep breath. There were some who wet themselves and others who vomited as well… Hajime addressed them all with a kind smile.

「Hey, everyone staring here.」

「「「「「「「!」」」」」」」

The adventurers shook with Hajime's voice. They were completely struck with fear. Hajime looked at all of them without a care…

and made a demand.

「Smile.」

「「「「「「「Eh?」」」」」」」

The adventurers were puzzled by this sudden demand which ignored the situation entirely.

「Didn't you hear me? I said to smile. Do your best not to look scary. A child is in here, and she's frightened because of all of you. She might have some trauma, right? Huh? Take responsibility.」

Then don't bring a child here in the first place! They all wanted to

say that, but stopped short of it. While looking at Hajime with puzzled gazes, they desperately forced themselves to smile. Some even waved.

Seeing the men smile in such a forced manner was a surreal event. Hajime quietly talked to Myuu who buried her face into his chest.

Myuu timidly looked up at Hajime with wet eyes before turning around slowly.

Naturally, everyone was shaking in desperation. 「Hii!」

Myuu returned to her original position in fright. Hajime lifted an eyebrow and said 「What's the meaning of this!」while the adventurers simply looked at him as if saying 「Don't be so unreasonable!」Hajime finally looked at Yue for help.

「Haa～」Yue sighed loudly and whispered to Myuu. Myuu timidly looked up as the adventurers desperately tried to look friendly.

For a while, Myuu stared at the adventurers in silence before smiling and waving her hand. Because her gesture was far too cute, everyone forgot about the situation and relaxed in harmony. Hajime, too, was satisfied and carried Myuu on his shoulders as he walked to the counter, no longer interested in the adventurers.

The moment they reached the counter, everyone collapsed, but he simply ignored it and spoke to the receptionist.

By the way, the receptionist was also cute. She was a girl the same age as Hajime and his classmates. Even so, her strained expression messed with her charm.

「Is the Head in? I have a letter from the head of the Fyuren Guild Branch… I was told to directly pass it to the person in question.」

Hajime presented his Status Plate to the receptionist. She stood up as professionally as she could and took it from him.

「Y, yes. I see. U, um, so this is a request from the head of the Fyuren Guild Branch… right?」

Usually, a mere adventurer would not receive such a request. The

receptionist, a bit suspicious, opened her eyes wide as she read the information on his Status Plate.

「G, “Gold” rank!? 」

Fewer than 10% of all adventurers were “Gold” rank, and only those with approval from guild staff could become “Gold.” Naturally, this receptionist also understood everything about “Gold” rank adventurers, but she had not heard of Hajime, so she spoke up involuntarily.

Everyone in the Adventurer Guild heard her voice and stared at Hajime in astonishment. The building quickly grew noisy.

The receptionist, noticing she had exposed an individuals information aloud, turned pale, and began to bow furiously.

「E, excuse me! I really am sorry! 」

「Ah～ No. I don’t care. Anyway, can you get the head of this office? 」

「Y, yes! Just a moment! 」

Hajime smiled bitterly toward the receptionist who continued to apologize. His fight in 【Ul】in which he annihilated a large number of demons as well as his rampage against an underground organization in 【Fyuren】were, obviously, hidden.

Naturally, a “Gold” rank adventurer who was a boy surrounded by

a beautiful woman and girls while carrying a child would attract attention. Hajime and the girls simply waited for the receptionist to return.

As for Myuu who was not used to this attention, she was being soothed by the girls. Since Tio was a bad influence, she was promptly slapped. Though the surroundings turned more noisy, the group ignored it all.

In less than 5 minutes, a sound could be heard from deep within the guild. Hajime observed as a boy dressed in black flew out and slid down the rails and jumped over the counter, looking about for someone.

Hajime knew the person by sight and muttered on instinct. He did not think he would meet this person here.

「… Endo?」

Indeed, there was one of Hajime's classmates present — Endo Kousuke.

"!" The boy in black responded to Hajime's mutter as if he were an enemy in a famous video game who had just found someone who appeared from a cardboard box; Kousuke Endo looked around the surroundings and was annoyed to have not found the person he was searching for.

「Nagumo! It's you! It's you, right? Where are you! Nagumo! If you're alive, get out here! Nagumo Hajime!」

From his loud voice, people began plugging up their ears one after another. The classmate who should have died might be alive, and he was desperately calling out to confirm what he heard.

Yue and the others glanced at Hajime. Hajime scratched his cheek, not wanting to associate with Endo who was calling his name.

「Ah～ Endo? Please stop calling my name out so loudly, I can hear you properly.」

「!? Nagumo! Where are you!」

Endo reacted to Hajime's voice and turned to him. Hajime unintentionally pulled back, seeing his desperate face.

For a moment, the two looked at each other, but Endo began looking around the vicinity.

「Shit! I hear the voice, but is it a ghost? Will it come out if I hide myself!? Where is he!?」

「No, I'm right here in front of you. Rather, idiot, be quiet. You're supposed to be the one with the thinnest existence in the world.」

「!? That voice again!? Rather, it's worse than you think, the man at the convenience store doesn't react to me even if I'm right there! And automatic doors only open one in three times!」

「Wasn't it two out of three in middle school…? As expected of

you.」

They exchanged a few words; Endo noticed the person in the vicinity with white hair and an eye patch and stared intently at his face. Hajime looked away with an unpleasant look, because he did not have a hobby that would make him glad to be looked at by a man. Endo called out to him again.

「You… You're Nagumo… right?」



「Haa… yeah, that's it. I look like this, but it's true, I'm Nagumo Hajime.」

Endo observed Hajime from top to bottom, doubtful since Hajime did not match what was in his memories; however, he finally started to believe since Hajime knew about the thinness of his

existence.

「You're… alive?」

「Naturally, since I'm right here in front of you.」

「You've changed a lot… your appearance, atmosphere, tone…」
「I crawled out of the Abyss on my own, right? Of course I would change.」

「R, really? No, but, well… so you're really alive…」 Though Endo looked at Hajime with a perplexed attitude, he understood the classmate that should have died was truly alive; his eyes softened in relief.

No matter how much he bullied Hajime because he was jealous Kaori paid attention to him, he never wanted him to die. Hajime's death had a big impact, so Endo was purely glad that he was alive.

「Actually… you're an adventurer? And "Gold"…」

「Mm～ Something like that.」

Endo's expression changed from Hajime's answer. It went from an expression of relief that his classmate was alive to an expression of trouble.

Hajime noticed Endo was tattered and tilted his head curiously thinking about what might happen.

「… In other words, you came back from the Abyss on your own and became strong enough to get the greatest adventurer rank? It's hard to believe…」

「Well, that's how it is.」

When Hajime confirmed Endo's thoughts, Endo gripped Hajime's shoulders strongly and begged him with a desperate voice.

「Then please! Come with me into the Labyrinth! If we don't hurry, everyone will die! I need a lot of help! Kentaro and Juugo could

die! Please, Nagumo!」

「W, wait a minute. What's this all about so suddenly!? How can I understand the situation just like that? You need help? Meld should do that, they can take care of a behemoth or two…」

Hajime was surprised at Endo's abnormal appearance and asked for more information. Endo, upon hearing Meld's name, became dark and crumbled to his knee. He muttered in a low tone.

「… ad.」

「Huh? I can't hear you. What was that?」

「… I said they're dead! Meld, Alan-san, everyone else! Everyone who went down died! To let me escape! They died! Because of me!」

「… I see.」

Hajime returned those words to Endo who repeated "They're dead" like a child who lost his temper.

Because Hajime was not a combatant class, he had little contact with Meld; still, the man he remembered had a good character. The day Hajime dropped into the Abyss, he remembered that the man believed in he who was called "Incapable."

He said 「I see,」 like usual. Still, Hajime felt a little regret. He said a small prayer in his heart.

「So? What happened?」

「That's…」

Endo clung to Hajime's knee with his head down and explained everything, his voice hoarse.

「Let's continue this conversation inside, honored guest.」 The voice came from a man in his 60s with a large scar over his left eye. Ambition flowed from his entire body.

Hajime thought he might be the head of the branch since the receptionist was by his side. Feeling the atmosphere after he had appeared out here, Endo thought it might be best to silently follow them.

Most likely, since Endo had revealed that something happened to the Heroes and the knights, he had created an odd air in the building.

The head of the Guild Branch caught Endo's arm and forced him to a stand. Endo was weary, currently emotionally unstable.

Hajime understood the story would not be a good one and simply followed them.

「… Devils…」

Hajime muttered quietly in the reception room.

The Guild Branch Manager, Roa Baubis, and Kousuke Endo sat on a sofa facing Hajime. Yue and Shea sat to each side of him while Tio sat next to Shea. Myuu was on Hajime's knee.

Those were the words Hajime first uttered. The surprise attack was suitable for Devils; Endo and Roa had a serious expression knowing the Heroes were in a predicament. The room was filled with an oppressive atmosphere.

- But the little girl on Hajime's knee was eating a piece of cake like a squirrel, her cheeks swollen, so it was hard to take anything seriously. Myuu, thinking the story was long, felt the

bad air and looked uneasily at Hajime, offering him cake.

「Rather! What's with that! That girl! Why is she just eating cake!? Don't you understand the situation!? Everyone might die!」

「Hiu!? Papa!」

Endo, who could not endure Myuu's existence as it destroyed the atmosphere, became angry. Myuu clung to Hajime in surprise.

Of course, an unnatural thirst for blood filled the room. Papa would not permit an enemy.

「You … why are you pointing and yelling at Myuu, huh? Want me to kill you?」

「Hii!?」

Endo fell down and called out similarly to Myuu.

From beside Hajime, the girls were saying 「… Completely a Papa,」 and 「He was saying "child" just a while ago~,」 or 「Master will not want to separate from the child if he keeps up like that~,」 and though he heard, Hajime ignored them. It

was most important to him to pacify Myuu who was afraid. Endo trembled while Roa looked at Hajime in amazement as he calmed Myuu down. The conversation would go nowhere at

this rate.

「Now then, Hajime. I roughly understand what happened from Iruwa's letter. It seems you went on quite a rampage, right?」

「Well, it just happened.」

Hajime shrugged as if everything was a matter of course; Roa smiled in interest.

「In the letter, it said you were promoted to “Gold” rank and that we should give you as much help as we can. It also summarized what happened… You destroyed an underworld organization in only half a day and killed fifty to sixty thousand demons with just the few of you. It’s hard to believe, but Iruwa isn’t the type to lie… Honestly, I wouldn’t be surprised if you were called a Demon King.」

Endo opened his eyes widely hearing Roa’s words. Personally, he thought Hajime would be stronger since he escaped from

【Orcus Great Labyrinth,】but he still expected Hajime to be weaker than himself.

After all, Hajime’s class was a noncombatant class, “Transmuter,” and he was always called “Incapable.” Even if he was “Gold” rank, since that was a standard set for adventurers of this world, he did not think it would compare to they who were summoned. At most, he thought Hajime would be able to restore the teleporter and act as battle support.

Originally, Endo went to the Adventurer Guild to find high-ranking adventurers who could help in rescuing Kouki and the others. Of course, he did not believe they would be able to reach the depths, but he thought they could at least protect the teleporter.

Though there were knights, he would have to report to the Kingdom first, and they would be able to handle Floor 30 at most. To protect the teleporter on Floor 70, he needed adventurers of at least “Silver” rank.

With that thought, he went to the second floor of the Adventurer Guild, but the Heroes were the hope of humanity, and the strongest knights of the Kingdom were the ones that were originally protecting the 70th floor. Hearing his request and knowing the guard was annihilated, everyone grew uneasy.

Roa, noticing the riot, dragged Endo back by the neck and questioned him; at that time, the receptionist holding Hajime's Status Plate ran in.

He noticed he had undervalued Hajime's ability. Seeing as he might be stronger, Endo was surprised comparing Hajime to his past self.

Endo froze because he was too surprised while Roa and Hajime continued their talk.

「Please don't say stupid things… Demon King, isn't that too weak?」

「Fuu, you're treating the Demon King like small fry? That's some big talk… But if it's true, I have a request for you as head of Horuad Guild Branch.」

「… To rescue the Heroes?」

Endo, hearing this, regained his thoughts and called out to Hajime.

「Th, that's right! Nagumo! Let's go together! If you're that

strong, you can help everyone!」「…」

Though Endo's eyes shined full of hope, Hajime did not have a good reaction. He was thinking about something in the distance. Endo, naturally, was confused, since he thought Hajime would answer him promptly.

「What's wrong! Right now, they might be dying! We can't hesitate! They're your companions, aren't they!」

「… Companions?」

Hajime's eyes caused Endo, who had grown heated, to calm down. Endo backed away unintentionally. He remembered the thirst for blood a while ago; even so, he could not stop himself from speaking further.

「Y, yeah. Your companions! In that case, let's go help…」

「Don't just include me in your jolly group of friends on your own. I will say this now, but to me, you are but a single human from the "same town." I'll treat you no different from anyone else.」

「Wha!? No… what are you saying…」

Hajime's cold words completely pushed Endo back. What Hajime was thinking about, in short, were the disadvantages to him if he helped Kouki and the others.

As Hajime said, he only recognized them as acquaintances. He had no desire for vengeance, but he did not particularly want to help them, either.

His answer would normally be *NO*. But he connected that answer to

Aiko's "lonely way of life." If so, his experiences in 【the Town of Ul】would all become for naught.

Furthermore, Hajime remembered the conversation under the moonlight. When they came to this world, she said "I'll protect you, Nagumo-kun," to he who was "Incapable." Hajime acted rashly, and, according to the uneasiness she felt, he did the unreasonable and disappeared into the Abyss. Though he promised to "be protected" to ease her anxiety, he could not fulfill that promise in the end.

Hajime remembered her outstretched hand with a sorrowful expression many times once he reached this town.

「Shirasaki… is she still safe?」

「Eh?」Endo was in a fluster. Endo thought Hajime would not cooperate, so he began talking about Kaori in a rush.

「Y, yeah. Kaori-san is safe. Rather, they're not safe. It's thanks to her that Yaegashi-san didn't die after that first attack… Kaori-san is seriously amazing. Her Recovery Magic is great… On that day when you fell, she focused entirely on training… Maybe her atmosphere changed a little, too? She's become more like an adult? Either way, something changed…」

「… I see.」

Hajime returned those words to Endo who desperately spoke.

Hajime sighed loudly and scratched his head violently while looking at his precious partner who was staring at him from the side.

「… Just do what you want. I will follow you anywhere.」「… Yue.」

Hajime returned a gaze full of affection while Yue grasped his hand kindly.

「M, me too! I'll go anywhere with you! Hajime-san!」「Right. Of course, I will go as well, Master.」

「Fue, um, umm, Myuu too!」

Because Hajime and Yue were entering their own world again, Shea and Tio answered in a panic. Myuu, who did not understand the situation, clung to him.

「Eh? What's with this harem…」Endo muttered to himself in amazement.

「Thank you. I don't want to associate with the God-chosen Heroes, and I don't want to get you involved, either… but there is someone there I need to fulfill a promise with. I'll go. Well, I think we should be able to handle this ourselves.」

Hajime's words revealed his true intention. The Heroes were a

group of people he did not want to approach so readily.

But, perhaps Kaori, worried for Hajime, was doing the unreasonable. Kaori, who believed he was alive, would break, knowing she could not protect him; he wanted to fulfill his promise with her.

He was not particularly worried about the risks. He had fought the wolves which Endo mentioned in his story, and the strength of the chimeras was likely about the same as the creatures at about Floor 10 in the Abyss.

「U, um, you're all going together?」

「Yeah. Roa, for now, I will take your request, but…」「You won't help unconditionally?」

「That's right. Also, something else. Please lend a room to me so Myuu can wait here.」

「Ah, I can do that much.」

Endo let out a deep sigh of relief knowing he would go with Hajime.

Since they were going to deep levels, they could not take a child with them, so he entrusted Myuu to the guild. Myuu seemed to resist intensely but gave way after everyone tried to calm her down. Incidentally, Tio was left to be baby-sitter and guard. At last, they left with Endo guiding them.

「Hey, let's hurry up, Endo.」

「Uwa, don't kick me! Rather, you changed way too much!」「Shut it. I want this done in a day… no, half a day. It can't be

helped, since Myuu is waiting, so let's hurry up and get back. She's together with a pervert.」

「… You really are like a father… you have a harem full of beautiful girls… What on earth happened, Nagumo…」

While running toward the Labyrinth, Endo muttered, not quite convinced by Hajime's words and atmosphere.

Having a strong helper, he regained some of his presence of mind. He was nudged forward, being told he had time to run if he had time to talk. Endo moved, praying for the safety of his friends.

「Uu…」

「Suzu-chan!」「Suzu!」

Kaori and Eri looked at Suzu as she slowly opened her eyes with a groan, calling out to her in joy. Suzu's eyes moved about slowly and restlessly before she spoke.

「It, It's an unfamiliar ceiling～」

「Suzu, I know you're an entertainer, but is there really a need for that at this time?」

She was thirsty, clearly. Despite Shizuku's barbs, hearing the hoarseness in her voice, Shizuku handed Suzu a leather flask filled with water.

Gokyu Gokyu, Suzu filled herself with the delicious moisture and

called out 「Suzu revived! Literally!」as she worked hard to sit up. Kaori and Eri supported her.

This mood maker for the class immediately dispersed the concern surrounding her, and the classmates who had a sunken mood were now smiling.

Still, contrary to her atmosphere, her complexion was still poor. She was tired and anemic. Her ability to smile through all that was her "strength." Kaori and Shizuku looked at her in respect.

「Suzu-chan. You need to lie down still. You can't replenish the blood you lost…」

「Yeah～ Suzu really doesn't feel steady on her legs～ Damn her～ To think she could do that to the pretty Suzu… Suzu wanted to say 『I did it ♡」while on the bed!」

「Suzu! Quiet! Stop being so vulgar!」

While blushing, Eri looked at Suzu reproachfully. Some of the boys started to laugh, but promptly stopped when glared at.

「Suzu, it's good you're awake. We were worried.」

「What, so you're fine. Actually, isn't your face a bit pale?」 Kouki and Ryuutarou approached, hearing the ruckus around

Suzu.

For some time, he would be weak due to "Limit Break," and, though he was depressed at the severe defeat, he seemed to recover some due to the length of time since.

「Morning, Kouki-kun, Ryuutarou-kun! It looks like we managed to get away? Um, so everyone is fine… eh, we're missing someone…」

「Yeah, that's Endo. He went on ahead. Even if he's by himself, I think he can get out of here and…」

While greeting Kouki and Ryuutarou with a smile, Suzu had looked around and noticed someone was missing. Because she had lost consciousness, Kouki answered her question and gave an explanation.

As an aside, Kondo and Saitou already had their petrifaction resolved and awoken., they had also been briefed on the situation.

「I see, so that much time passed… ah, right. Kaorin, thanks! I

heard you saved me!」

「Suzu-chan, that's my job. It's natural, you're exaggerating things.」

「Kuu, a stoic Kaorin is wonderful! Will you marry me?」「Suzu… It's scary when you say it with a pale face.」

Eri admonished Suzu. They were falling back into their natural patterns. With everyone still alive, they regained some room in the minds, despite being anxious.

However, someone threw cold water on the warming atmosphere.

「… What's with all this happiness? Weren't we nearly dead? This doesn't change our situation, either. If you have time to joke, then think of a way out of this!」

Kondo Reiichi yelled out at Suzu. Though he did not call out, Yoshiki Saito was criticizing her with his gaze.

「Hey, Kondo. Calm down, right? Suzu's just trying to ease the tension…」

「Shut up! Don't think a loser can say anything to me! Because you lost, I almost died! You shit! What kind of Hero are you!」

Though Kouki tried to admonished Kondo, it only served to throw oil over the fire.

「You… Who is it thanks to that we could escape? You only escaped because of Kouki!」

Ryuutarou responded in anger. Even so, Kondo retorted.

「If you won in the first place, we wouldn't have had to run! Actually, it was obviously a bad situation, yet you went and fought without even thinking about it! This is your fault! Take responsibility!」

Kondo stood up and the two glared at each other. Nakano, who sympathized with Kondo and Saito, also stood up and faced Ryuutarou.

「Ryuutarou, I'm fine… Kondo, I will take responsibility. I won't lose this time. I understand that woman better, and I won't suffer from a surprise attack. I definitely can win this time!」

Though Kouki clasped his fist to stress this, Saitou looked at him darkly.

「… But you couldn't win, even with "Limit Break."」「Th, that's… I'll be fine this time!」

「Why can you say that?」

「I'll fire "Heaven's Might" into the enemy from the start. If everyone can cover me…」

「But it's got a long chant, right? And when they know such an annoying attack is coming, do you think they'll just sit around? The demons aren't that idiotic.」

Even if Kouki said they would be fine, Kondo and the others distrusted his ability and continued to complain.

This could not be helped; having lost, they could not have presence of mind knowing the person protecting them was weakened, especially when their enemy was large in number.

Ryuutarou, who had a quick temper, began to argue with Kondo and the others. Ayako, Yoshino, and Nomura tried to intervene.

In the end, Ryuutarou held up his fist while Kondo brought his spear forward. Kouki quickly held Ryuutarou's shoulders. Though Ryuutarou stopped then, Kondo did not, a vein appeared on his head. He was partly just being stubborn.

「Everyone, settle down! Kouki can only do his best so we can survive. He'll have to defeat the woman and her demons within the time frame of "Limit Break." She won't overlook us. Understand?」

Shizuku stood between the two to calm them down, but the effect was weak. Suzu was too weak to stand, and Kondo did not seem to want to listen until he heard an apology. Kaori prepared to restrain everyone with magic… then they heard it.

「Gurururururu…」

「「「「!?」」」」

A groan, low and deep, that they were familiar with. The chimeras and wolves appeared in their minds… The

dangerous mood was blown away, and everyone stiffened.

Their breathing was shallow, and they concentrated on the wall camouflaging the entrance.

Zari! Zari! Fushu! Fushu!

They heard the sound of scratching and a rough snort. Someone swallowed their saliva. Their signs and odors should have been removed by Endo, and even strong demons should not have been able to sense their presence. Their bodies grew stiff, they broke out in sweats.

It would take time before they were completely ready. Suzu could barely join combat, and Kaori and Ayako, who had used magic to heal the others, would take time to recover. As for the vanguard, they had nearly recovered, but the rear guard were still only halfway back to full; they wanted to rest as long as possible.

Kaori and Ayako especially, who were helping Suzu and the others, were in danger if the demons found them. Kouki stared at the wall, begging they not be found.

For a while, though the demon remained outside, it eventually left. Silence returned again. Though everyone stood still, they all heaved a sigh of relief, some even collapsed where they stood. They were all sweating due to the tension.

「… We could have been found if we were any noisier. Please, just stay calm and rest.」

「Y, yeah…」 「O, Okay…」

Shizuku wiped away the sweat on her brow and spoke to everyone. Kondo and the others stammered and stopped fighting. It was as if they were doused in cold water.

For now, everyone relaxed having gotten through a crisis… at that moment,

「Ruguaaaaa!!!」

The wall, separating the safe room from the outside, was crushed.
「Uwa!?」

「Kyaaa!!」

The wreckage of the wall vanished as bullets of stone flew

through the room, hitting Kondo and Yoshino who were in line. The two fell back and screamed.

The next moment, a distortion in space appeared. They all stood at the ready.

「Prepare to fight!」

「Shit! Why did they find us!」

Kouki pulled out the Holy Sword and prepared to stab the chimera so he could cut the enemy down the moment it appeared. Ryuutarou cursed and placed himself in front of the passage to prevent further invasion.

However,

「Oooohhh!!」「Guu!!」

A brutal demon's body was hurled inside like a cannonball, knocking Ryuutarou down as well.

All at once, many black cats invaded, attacking with their tentacles, attacking Kondo's group who were arguing earlier without mercy. Though they tried to block the demons with their arms, there were too many.

「— "Heavenly Divide!"」

「— "Heavenly Divide!"」

Thirty shining barriers appeared in space, diverting the attack orbit. They had been activated with short arias. Suzu had created twenty barriers and Kaori ten.

However, Suzu was lying against the wall while Kaori was exhausted. Their strength was apparent even in their magic.

Though they were able to divert the impact at an angle, the shields could not endure the attacks from the numerous tentacles.

Eventually, the shields shattered. The enemies targeted Nakano and Saito.

Though the two twisted their bodies, since they were in the rear guard and had little physical strength, they were only just able to avoid mortal wounds. Nakano was pierced in his shoulder while Saito fell to the ground screaming, his thigh injured.

「Shinji! Yoshiki! Shit! Daisuke, help!」

「… Y, yeah.」

Kondo called out to Hiyama who seemed to have been lost in thought ever since they escaped to the hidden room. He did not blame Hiyama since the situation was so sudden.

Kondo dragged the injured Nakano and Saito near Suzu. Despite being injured, her magic power was best utilized near her, so she acted as the first safety zone. Kaori was nearby to treat as well.

Though Kondo was anxious about Hiyama who seemed to have brooded over something for some time since they had escaped to the safe room, he did not say anything due to the situation and dragged the injured Nakano and Saito to Suzu. Even if she was not in top shape, even if she had little magic remaining, the area around Suzu was the safest at the moment. It would also be easier for them to receive treatment from Kaori.

「Ku, Kouki! Go ahead and use “Limit Break!” We’ll manage this room somehow!」

「But, Suzu still can’t move… 」

「At this rate we'll all die! Please! We need someone to break through!」

「Kouki! Leave this to us! We definitely won't die!」

「… I understand! I'll leave it to you, then! "Limit Break!"」 He thought about Shizuku and Ryuutarou's words. Kouki had a

firm expression as the only one who could possibly change the situation. He exercised "Limit Break" for a second time this day.

It was impossible to continuously use "Limit Break" due to the load on his body. Though "Limit Break" typically lasted for 8 minutes, most likely, he would not last as long this time. While expecting this, Kouki concentrated only on defeating the female devil and left the safe room.

When he left the room, he saw numerous demons and the woman with the white crow on her shoulder.

Kouki held down his anger with his sense of duty and stared at

her head on.

「Hmm, it took quite some time; honestly, I have other things to take care of…」

「Silence! I will definitely defeat you! Prepare yourself!」

Kouki made his declaration and ran magic through the Holy Sword with a short incantation. Though he was at a distance where

nothing he did would likely reach the woman, he still believed himself and abbreviated the incantation for “Heaven’s Might.”

However, the woman smiled slightly seeing the light of the Holy Sword shine brighter; she ordered the brutal demons nearby to drag out something behind her.

Though Kouki had a suspicious expression, he was surprised by the true character of that “something.” His eyes opened widely and he quietly called out with a trembling voice.

「… M, Meld-san?」

Before him, with limbs crushed and neck held, was Meld and his men in a near- death state, the brutal demon holding him up. His body hung loosely, as if he were dead, but his occasional moans indicated his survival.

『Y, you! Let go of Meld-san!』

Kouki was driven further to anger; When he tried to rush the woman, as if waiting for this timing, Kouki was enveloped in a huge shadow. When Kouki looked back, he could see a tremendous fist which was like a wall bear down on him.

Kouki managed to guard with his left arm on instinct, but the fist easily crushed his guard. Kouki felt the strong impact and was thrown to the side as if he were hit by a dump truck. The wall he was thrown into had cracks appear beneath him.

「Gaha!」

He lost his breath from the impact and slid down the wall. Kouki desperately supported his body with his right arm, vomiting large amounts of blood all the meanwhile. Most likely, he did not die immediately because of the derivation skill of “Physical Tolerance,” [+Impact Suppression.]

He had a concussion and was unable to focus as he desperately

tried to understand the situation. At last, when he came to, he saw a huge demon 3 meters tall with its fist thrust where Kouki was moments ago.

The demon had a horse head with fangs. It had four arms coming from its torso, its sinews tensing with every movement. Its lower body was that of a gorilla. Steam gushed from the horse head with each breath. From its atmosphere, it was clearly different from the other demons.

It pulled its fist back and rushed forward while releasing a dense blood lust toward Kouki who could still not stand yet. It brought its fist down on Kouki.

Kouki rolled along the ground on instinct alone and desperately escaped.

When he thought he managed to escape, a dark crimson ripple spread across the ground immediately, followed by destruction.

This was its unique magic, “Impact Conversion.” It was a simple skill which converted magic into a shock wave. Despite being

simple, it was a powerful ability.

He stood up and desperately set up the Holy Sword. At that time, the creature was already before his eyes, its fist thrust forward.

Though Kouki's left arm was crushed, he used the Holy Sword as a shield. The impact blew his right arm back. Another attack followed up. Though Kouki managed to avoid a mortal wound, he was affected by "Impact Conversion" utilized by each of the four fists. His damage from the first attack was still present, and his body was no longer moving as he desired. He could not find any chance to counter at all.

「Guu! What's with his strength! Even though I'm using "Limit Break!"」

「Ruaaaaaa!!」

Kouki was frustrated and impatient. Despite using "Limit Break," he was being overwhelmed. At this rate, the damage would accumulate, so he needed to counterattack.

However…

「!?」

Before he could execute his decision, "Limit Break" timed out. He lost his strength immediately. It was punishment for using it twice in so short a time frame. He was assaulted by a heaviness and could not find the strength to do anything. He fell to his knee.

The demon was sure not to miss this opportunity. Its fist hit Kouki's abdomen squarely.

「Gaha!」

His body bent as he vomited blood and was thrown into a wall again. He was now weak as a side effect of "Limit Break," so Kouki's consciousness quickly suffered. He fell down and twitched, his body in danger from the mortal injury. It was a mystery why he did not die immediately; perhaps the creature was taking it easy so he would survive.

The creature gripped Kouki by his neck as he lost consciousness. It presented him to the female devil who nodded as she waited for the other demons who were ordered to attack the safe room.

After a while, Shizuku and the class appeared, full of wariness. Their expressions were full of despair as they saw the beast gripping Kouki.

「No… No way… Kouki lost…?」 「It, It can't be…」

「No… how…」

His companions who came out of the hidden room saw Kouki as he hung.

They could not speak, even Shizuku, Kaori, and Suzu had lost their spirit as the Devil woman spoke coldly to them.

「Hmph, he was caught with something that simple. Really… just a little brat you can find on the streets.」

Shizuku, pale, responded as courageously as she could. 「… What did you do?」

「Hm? This, this.」

As she said this, she turned her gaze to Meld gripped by the brutal demon. At that moment, Shizuku and the others understood. Seeing Meld and the knights in a near death state, Kouki reacted as he always had. In short, he lost his calmness.

Perhaps the woman understood his straight forward nature in the previous fight. She used the chimera's peculiar ability to hide strong demons, aiming for the point where Kouki lost his temper and attacked.

「… So, what will you do now? What is it that we should expect? You're even responding to my questions, so you have your own plans in mind, don't you?」

「That's right. Like I thought, you're able to judge the situation. It's nothing special. It won't be any different from before. I'll ask you to join us once again. The last time, this Hero of yours decided everything on his own. You, too, seem quite excellent, so I'll ask you again. So? How about it?」

Some reacted to her words and stared at Shizuku in doubt. 「… What do you intend to do with Kouki? 」

「Fu fu, how shrewd… though I feel a bit bad, but I can't make use of this Hero. No matter what, persuading him is impossible, isn't it? He's the type to do things on his own. He's a security risk, so I have no reason to keep him alive. 」

「… And we are the same? 」

「Of course. If there's any possible source of anxiety, then there's no reason for me to keep you alive. 」

「Even if I join you now, doesn't that only lead to the possibility of betrayal in the future? 」

「Of course, I thought of that. That's why I'll put a collar on you. Ah, don't worry, it won't deprive you of your freedom, only of your ability to rebel. 」

「So a slave with a high degree of flexibility. Though we have our own will, we recognize that we can't injure our master. 」

「Right, right. It's good that you pick things up quickly. Unlike the Hero here, you can be talked to. 」

The classmates silently listening to their conversation looked at

one another in fear. If they did not join her, they would be attacked by the demons that even Kouki had difficulty with, leading to his near death; however, they would never be able to fight the Devil woman if they joined her and would fight against humanity.

In other words, they would not be “God’s Apostles.” Could they really protect the teachings of the Saint Church…? Could they really return home…

Either way, they did not see a good future…

「I, I think we should go with her!」

Everyone looked at Eri who spoke those words. Everyone was surprised.

Ryuutarou’s face was dyed in anger as he shouted at Eri. 「Eri, you! Will you desert Kouki!」

「Hii!?」

「Ryuutarou, settle down! Eri, why do you think that?」

Eri shrunk back at Ryuutarou’s words, but Shizuku admonished him and calmed her down. She grasped her hand and took a deep breath.

「I, I… I don’t want everyone to die… For Kouki-kun, I… What else can we do… Uu…」

Eri spoke with tears in her eyes. Seeing her, everyone’s mind shook. Then, another person who agreed with her spoke up.

「I agree with her. It's already been decided. Do we die here? Or do we survive? Why should we hesitate?」

「Hiyama… so you don't care about what happens to Kouki? Huh?」

「Fine, Sakagami, you want to commit double suicide, since none of us here can fight anymore?」

「That's not it! Not at all!」

「If you have no alternative, then shut up. We can't survive alone.」

The room remained silent. As Hiyama said, no one wanted to die. Even so, they could not make a choice so easily with Kouki's life at

stake. They could think of no way to save Kouki.

Again, the woman made a proposal with a strange timing.

「Very well. So you're worried about the Hero… How can I use this? Then instead of killing him, what if I place a collar on him far stronger than the ones that would be placed on you, and, in return, you join my side?」

Shizuku clicked her tongue secretly hearing this proposal. She guessed the woman would propose this from the beginning. If she was going to kill Kouki from the start, there would be no need for this discussion.

In short, she utilized him to full efficacy. Perhaps, seeing the last fight, she realized Kouki was a talented fighter; however she could not convince Kouki, no matter what. However, the other people had not realized this. With this, she could use Kouki to draw the rest of them into her group.

One requirement was to not kill Kouki immediately; the second was to corner the class into life or death, and the third was to remove the issue holding the class back.

She said she wanted to make use of Kouki as best she could. In truth, even if he joined, he would clearly betray them.

There was no guarantee she could make use of him, either. Still, even if he regretted his decision at that point, he could not act against the Devils.

Shizuku understood the risks and realized they no longer had an option but to join the Devils if they wanted to survive. So long as they lived, they could find a way to save Kouki.

As for the woman, getting Shizuku and the others was a large boon. Needless to say, it would have a large impact on humanity. They were “God’s Apostles,” humanity’s hope, and they would be with the Devils. It would bring a deep despair. This was a massive advantage.

Second, it would achieve the woman’s true purpose of coming to 【Orcus Great Labyrinth】of replenishing their war potential. Though the group had easily succumbed to the demons she had

here, they would easily replace the demons they had already killed.

At this rate, they would have to go. Realizing this, the woman smiled.

However, a pained voice erased the atmosphere at once.
「Everyone… stop… don't go with her… 」

「Kouki! 」

「Kouki-kun! 」 「Amanogawa! 」

Everyone called out to Kouki as he was suspended before their eyes.

「… I was tricked… Alan-san and everyone… they'll die… don't…

they'll fight against us… we'll be enslaved… run away… I'm fine… so… leave me… and run… 」

「… How do you expect us to survive in this situation? We've already lost! If we want to survive, we can only follow her! 」

Hiyama shouted angrily. He was angry because Kouki was unable to finish everything. Hiyama wanted to survive, no matter what, even if everyone else died; the only other person he wanted to live was Kaori. To try to escape was an all or nothing tactic, and it would likely be unsuccessful.

On the other hand, if he could earnestly show how useful he was to the Devils, he might secure a good position. In that case, he might even obtain Kaori. Of course, their free will would be limited by collars. Hiyama did not care whether she had free will or not. He was happy enough if she was his.

Everyone was surprised by Hiyama's anger.

At that time, a small, yet powerful groan extended through the room. It was a voice which should not have been on this battlefield, a voice which had supported them many times. No matter the situation, his reliable voice guided them, and it now made them hesitate. Everyone thought their reliable role model was returning, he was something like a father to them. It was Commander Meld's voice.

「Guu… All of you… only think about surviving… go forward with what you believe… I'm sorry… we involved you in our war… I have regretted it… every moment I spent with you… So live

and return home… Don't worry about us… from the beginning… this was our war!」

Everyone opened their eyes wide hearing Commander Meld's words. Meld managed to shake off the brutal demon, light emitting from his entire body. He quickly grappled with the woman.

「Devil… We'll die together!」

「… That's… hmm, self destruction? Quite brave. I don't hate

that.」

「You won't get away!」

Light enveloped Commander Meld. Magic was running through his body like "Limit Break." Rather, it was not from his body but a gem around his neck.

The woman, seeing this, deduced what he was doing immediately and praised Commander Meld.

The gem was a cursed tool used for a suicidal explosion, "Final Loyalty." As the woman said, it was a self-destruction tool. As someone amongst the higher ups of the Saint Church, he was privy to important information. There was Dark Magic which could be used to read memories, so such tools were necessary as one climbed the ranks. In an emergency case, in order to prevent his mind from being read, he would self-destruct, involving the enemy.

This was Commander Meld's final attack, risking his life. Kouki screamed out his name; however, it did not seem the woman had lost any of her room to relax.

The light grew brighter as "Final Loyalty" was about to activate.
「Eat it, Absod.」

When the woman spoke, the light began to weaken and "Final Loyalty" began losing its power.

「Wha!? What is this!」

The light seemed to flow in a certain direction. Commander Meld looked while desperately grappling with the woman. There he saw a six headed demon shaped like a turtle. The light was being inhaled in its mouth.

The turtle with six heads was called Absod. It had a unique magic, “Magic Storage,” and it could arbitrarily take in magic and stock it within its body. It was not possible to store multiple types of magic, however. Furthermore, it could compress the magic it stored and fire it from its mouth. It could swallow even Advance Rank magic; it was a natural enemy to those whose main fighting potential lay in magic.

The light of “Final Loyalty” was quickly lost. Finally, the gem was exhausted; Meld was stunned as his final means of struggling was hindered in an unexpected way. Suddenly, he felt an impact. The shock was not too strong, but it caused Commander Meld to look down at his abdomen.

There, a red blade had pierced him. To be precise, the blade had cut through him from behind and carried through his abdomen. His blood dripped down the blade onto the floor.

「… Meld-san!」

Kouki ignored his own bleeding and cried out to Meld. Meld reacted and looked back at Kouki. His mouth whispered 「Sorry」as he looked mortified.

The woman swept the blade sideways, throwing Meld to the side. He flew like a doll with its strings cut and fell to the ground. Everyone could see he was mortally wounded. It was a miracle he

was able to move even before this attack. Everyone understood he had finally met his end.

Even if she knew she was not in time, Kaori still tried to use Recovery Magic remotely on Meld. Though she lessened his bleeding to some degree, she barely had any energy left and was unable to close his wounds.

「Uu, please! Heal!」

With her magic dried up, Kaori was assaulted by a sensation of worthlessness and fell to her knees.

「Honestly, I did not think he would stand up again with his wounds. As expected of the Knight Commander of the Kingdom. He is quite praiseworthy. However, it is over now…

so, what will you do?」

The female devil glared at Kouki while lightly shaking the stone blade which was dyed red in Meld's blood. Again, they had seen someone close to them die. Excluding some people, everyone trembled. They knew what would happen if they did not follow the woman.

Hiyama stood up and began muttering to represent everyone. At that time,

「… with me.」

Kouki feebly muttered something while being held by the horse-headed demon. Despite being covered in wounds, Hiyama could feel a pressure emanating from Kouki's body, causing him to swallow his words.

「Ha? What was that?」

The woman, too, noticed Kouki mutter to himself and asked while snorting at him. She looked at Kouki, his gaze piercing right through her.

The woman took a deep breath on instinct. His eyes were silver-white and shining. The pressure he exuded forced her to step back, her instinct putting her on high alert. She gave an order to the horse-headed demon.

「Ahtod! Kill him!」「Ruooo!!」

The horse-headed demon, apparently named Ahtod, faithfully executed the woman's instructions and brought two of its fists together from both sides while using "Impact Conversion" to crush Kouki.

However, at that moment,

Ka!! A frightening light overflowed from Kouki like a torrent. The Ahtod's arm gripping Kouki was crushed.

「Ruooo!!」

It screamed in a different manner from before. The Ahtod dropped Kouki on reflex. Kouki kicked backward, moving as if he were not injured in the first place.

The kick hit the giant Ahtod directly, the impact sounding like cannon fire, and the creature was blown back into the wall.

Being stuck in the wall, it tried to force itself out.

Kouki's body seemed to sway when he appeared next to the Holy Sword and picked it up. He stared at the woman again, looking at her with dead eyes. At that time, a torrent of light emerged like a tornado once again.

— "Limit Break" derivation skill, [+Supreme Dominance.] Unlike "Limit Break" which would triple his stats within the time

limit, "Supreme Breakthrough" quintupled his stats. However, his limits had already been surpassed, and he had dragged out power by force. 30 seconds was Kouki's current limit.

Afterward, he would suffer extensive side effects. However, without considering that, Kouki rushed toward the

woman in anger. Only his hatred for Commander Meld's enemy remained in his mind. He was focused only on revenge.

The woman showed some haste as she ordered the surrounding

demons to attack Kouki. The chimeras performed a surprise attack, the black cats shot out their tentacles, and the brutal demons brandished their maces; however, Kouki ignored them and cut them down with the Holy Sword without halting for even a moment. He closed in on the woman.

「You! How dare you do that to Meld-san!!」「Tch!」

Kouki lowered the Holy Sword without hesitation. The woman clicked her tongue and increased the density of her stone sword to use it as a shield… which was easily torn apart by the torrent of light from the Holy Sword.

Having fallen back, her stone shield lost, her body would be cut in two. A large gash cut diagonally across her body, her blood spraying across the floor.

She crashed into the wall be hind her. Kouki approached, Holy Sword in hand.

「So it came… a reversal in this situation… It's like a three-bit play.」

In a pinch, he had awakened a power. The woman had resignation in her eyes as Kouki approached. Her mouth was distorted by

the irony.

Though the white crow beside her used its unique magic, it could not heal such a deep wound immediately, and Kouki would not give it time. This was completely checkmate. The woman bore with the pain and extended her right hand to a locket at her bosom.

Kouki saw it and had a steep expression, thinking she might self-destruct like Meld, so he tried to close the distance. Even if the woman died, the explosion might involve his classmates, so he wanted to take her out before that happened. However…

「I'm sorry… I'm going ahead first … I love you, Mikhail… 」 With a devoted expression, while looking at the locket in her

hand, the woman muttered words of parting. Kouki stopped his blade on reflex and looked suspiciously at her. The woman, noticing this, looked up at the blade only millimeters away.

Kouki had a ghastly expression as he looked down at the woman. Fear and hesitation was in his gaze.

The woman, seeing this, realized why Kouki stopped his sword. Suddenly, she looked back at him in contempt, shaking Kouki further.

「… I'm amazed… It can't be, you only just noticed? That you'll be

killing a "person." 」

「!? 」

Right, Kouki had been taught about Devils by Ishtar; they were more powerful versions of demons, cruel creatures who gained

wisdom; he recognized them as demons who had evolved. This was only strengthened when he saw the woman use demons. Even so, she showed love for someone and likely was loved in return. She was desperately trying to live; he could not fight a “person,” or perhaps he was simply unconscious of it before…

When the woman called out the name of her lover, it overturned his own common sense. The woman before him was not a demon, but a “person,” just like him. He recognized his actions as “murder.”

「It can’t be, you didn’t see us as “people”… that’s quite arrogant of you.」

「Th, that’s not… I, didn’t know…」

「Ha, don’t you mean, you “didn’t try to know?”」 「I, I…」

「Hm? What will you do? You weren’t fighting before but “hunting,” right? I’d just be an animal corpse, wouldn’t I? Why don’t you quickly get this hunt over with? You’ve done so quite a bit until now…」

「… L, let’s talk… if we talk, then surely…」

Kouki lowered the Holy Sword. The woman despised Kouki from the depths of her heart and gave an order in response.

「Ahtod! Aim for the Fencer! Everyone, attack!」

Ahtod had recovered from the impact and, according to the

woman's instructions, approached Shizuku quickly. Though her charisma did not even approach Kouki's, she excelled in remaining calm and decision making. Since she would be the most troublesome existence there, she was the first to be targeted.

The other demons also attacked Shizuku and the class. Given their merit, the woman wanted to attach collars on each of these top-class personnel. She judged it necessary in order to kill Kouki.

「Wha, why!」

「It seems you're not conscious of it… we are at "war." Despite having a huge power, you're immature! You are too dangerous! I will have you die here by all means! Look, if you don't help your companions, they'll all die!」

The woman did not respond to Kouki's earlier proposal.

With her words, Kouki turned around to see Shizuku thrown to the ground.

Ahtod and many powerful demons approached. They had received many surprise attacks and were completely overwhelmed. Ahtod was a demon that Kouki could not match with "Limit Break," Shizuku would not be able to handle it

alone.

Kouki was pale. Using his increased power from “Supreme Dominance,” he ran and stood between Ahtod and Shizuku in an instant, catching an attack which utilized “Impact Conversion.” He countered with the Holy Sword, cutting off the arm.

However, the moment he closed in to cut the creature down, as if replaying what happened before, he fell to his knees, losing all strength.

“Supreme Dominance” had reached its time limit, and his compensation was worse than simply being weakened; he was now paralyzed.

「At, at a time like this!」 「Kouki!」

Shizuku took aim at the Ahtod’s arm that Kouki had wounded, quickly grabbed him, and drew back as quickly as she could.

Kouki was unable to move, so his companions surrounded him. Then… there’s only one thing I can do! Shizuku thought as she stared at the Devil woman with murderous intent in her eyes.

「… Hmm. It seems you were aware we were trying to kill each other. Perhaps you’re more suitable to being called the Hero?」

The woman had been completely revived by the white crow and firmly stood up while talking to Shizuku.

「… That doesn't matter. I was soft in not correcting Kouki's naivety. I'll be paying this bill!」

Shizuku knew Kouki had a straight forward personality and an intense conviction. She herself recognized this was no game, so she felt responsible for neglecting the fact that Kouki had not realized he would be murdering others until now.

Shizuku, too, was not experienced with murder. She did not want to experience it, even by mistake. However, when she began learning the way of the sword, the "weight" of such determination was driven into her.

Even so, now that the time came, her resolution swung back and

forth from her fear, and she was shedding tears in her shame. Even so, Shizuku clenched her teeth, bit her lips, and desperately suppressed her emotions.

She took a pose to cut the woman down with the aid of "Motionless."

However, a chill ran down her back, and her instincts began screaming. She jumped back, only to see a black cat's tentacle appear where she was but a moment ago.

「I never said I wouldn't make the other demons attack you. Do

you think you can kill Ahtod and all the demons here?」「Kuu.」

The woman said,「Naturally, I'll be attacking, too」as she began chanting. While rapidly accelerating and decelerating with the use of "Motionless," Shizuku aimed to surpass the wave of demons and close in on the woman. Her expression was gradually dyed in despair.

Ahtod had a speed approaching Shizuku's own. Against such a gigantic beast, Shizuku could not escape it, Its fists approaching her like a bomb.

Shizuku was a Fencer who specialized in speed; as such, her defense was extremely low. Evasion and parrying were the basis of her defense. Damage accumulated little by little from just the after effects of "Impact Conversion." It was impossible for her to completely evade its attack as well as to ward them off.

Eventually, the damage got to her, and Shizuku's movements were dulled. It took only that chance in this fight which stretched her to her limits.

「Aguu!!」

Though she used her sword and sheathe as a shield, the Ahtod's fist partially crushed Shizuku's shoulder.

Her body flew and skipped off the ground. Shizuku laid there

powerless, her right arm bent at an impossible angle. The impact had passed through to her body, as she was having a coughing fit, vomiting up blood.

「Shizuku-chan!」

Kaori called out Shizuku's name. Though Shizuku gripped the handle of her now broken sword, she could not move.

At that time, Kaori began running to Shizuku's side. Even with all her magic gone, she could only think, 「I need to go to her side.」It was simply her desire.

Kaori ran out on impulse. With little magic remaining, her body moved uncertainly. Though voices called out to her to stop, they did not reach her ears. She simply charged rashly toward Shizuku. The demons would not overlook Kaori who was wide open. They began attacking mercilessly.

However, shining shields caught each attack. Countless shields formed a path leading Kaori to Shizuku.

「E he he. Being alone really is unpleasant.」

Suzu had created the shields. Her right hand was extended toward Shizuku despite her pale face. She had used all the shields she could to lead Kaori to Shizuku. She smiled lightly.

Suzu realized it. They would not live much longer.

In that case, she would use her magic to unite her beloved friends at the end. Naturally, because the defenses for the rest of her companions was now thinner… Suzu apologized to them in her mind. Even so, she continued creating shields to guide Kaori to Shizuku.

With the help of Suzu's shields, Kaori finally reached Shizuku with few wounds. She crouched and quietly embraced Shizuku's body, supporting her.

「K, Kaori… what are you… hurry, run. There's nothing we can do here.」

「No. It will be the same anywhere I am. If that's the case, I should be by Shizuku-chan's side.」

「… I'm sorry. I couldn't win.」

「Me too, I'm sorry for only being able to do this. I don't have much magic left.」

Kaori frowned and smiled at Shizuku. She used a magic to dull the pain. Shizuku, too, grasped Kaori's hand, her troubled smile

returning to her face.

A shadow appeared before the two people. Ahtod, with bloodshot eyes, looked down at Shizuku and Kaori as it drew close.

「Ruooo!!」it roared as it raised its hand.

Though one of Suzu's shields was between Ahtod and Kaori, the barrier seemed useless. A single fist could destroy it like paper, and Kaori and Shizuku would be killed simply from the shock wave.

With death quickly approaching, many things went through Kaori's mind. 「Ah, so this is the end?」She felt oddly calm as she watched the revolving shadow lantern of her memories. In the end, a certain scene played out before her.

The tea they had months ago. Her memories of the two of them talking alone. That night, they made an oath. He who was no longer here smiling in a troubled manner. Only when he was gone did she realize she "liked him." She chased after him, believing in his survival.

However, it had ended here as well. 「Again, I broke our promise.」Kaori had tears falling down her cheeks.

She wanted to call his name when they met once again.

She wanted to say it at least once… and so those words naturally formed.

「… Hajime-kun.」 At that moment,

A terrifying sound roared as the ceiling above Ahtod dropped sharply.

What appeared was a large, jet-black state surrounded by violent crimson sparks.

It had pierced through the ceiling and appeared.

The sparking jet-black stake directly hit the Ahtod before their eyes. There was no resistance. This abnormal demon who had dominated Kouki was crushed like tofu.

The stake was buried almost to its full length of 120 centimeters, its

crimson sparks scattering the blood and remaining pieces of flesh of the Ahtod.

To say the least of Kaori and the class, the demons attacking them, the female devil, it seemed as if even time itself had stopped.

An unbecoming silence ruled the area, no one understanding what happened; at that time, a shadow dropped down from the ceiling.

This person had his back to the rest of them, and when he landed, he lightly trampled down the remains of Ahtod, glaring at the surroundings.

And when he looked over his shoulder, he saw Kaori and Shizuku drawn closely to each other.

The moment their eyes met, a shock ran through Kaori's body. No, her heart had frozen the day she lost such an important

person, and it was suddenly being warmed by a raging flame; her heart beat intensely.

「… You two are as close as always.」

Kaori's heart rejoiced far before she had expected having now seen the man smile bitterly.

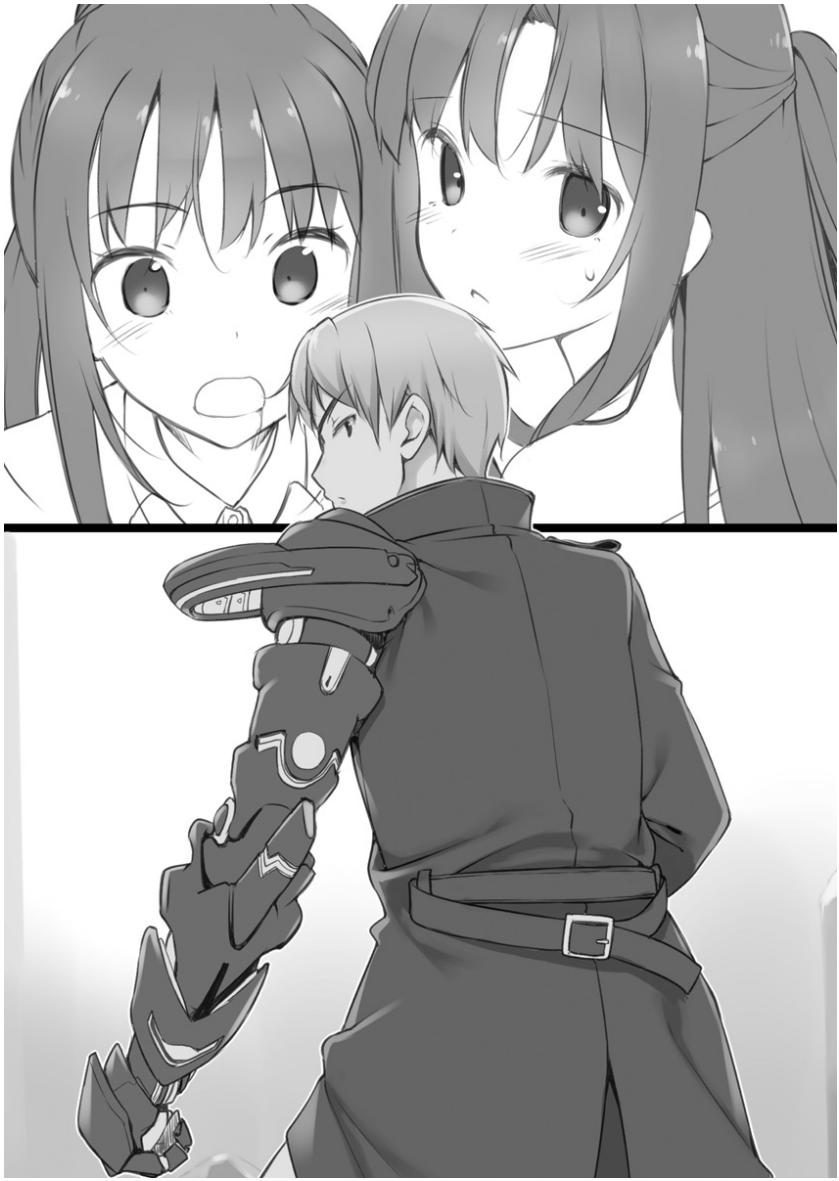
His hair color was different, his atmosphere was different, his tone was different, his appearance was different.

However, she understood. Kaori understood.

He was the man she believed remained alive, the one she searched for.

Yes.

「Hajime-kun!」



Chapter 5

「Eh? Hajime-kun? Nagumo-kun? Eh? What? What's going on?」 Hajime glanced at Shizuku who looked at him in confusion after hearing Kaori's cry. It seemed, somehow, that Kaori recognized the man with white hair and an eye patch as Hajime and Shizuku had yet to catch up.

However, the man's bitter smile as he looked about matched up with the Nagumo Hajime in her memories; Shizuku called out in astonishment as well.

「Eh? Eh? Really? It's really Nagumo-kun? Eh? What? Really, what's going on?」

「Calm down, Yaegashi. Your calmness is your selling point, isn't it?」

Shizuku's confusion still remained; she even spoke out, forgetting about her pain and her earlier inevitable death.

Hajime admonished her as he looked up when the sign of someone else appeared. He caught a fair- haired girl name Yue in a princess cradle and placed her down. He then did the same with a rabbit-eared girl named Shea.

Finally, a boy in black came down, Endo.

「N, Nagumo! You! What the hell are you doing! Rather, what's up with that! You suddenly destroyed the ground of the Labyrinth…」

「Nuo!」 Endo looked about as he complained and stiffened when he noticed his friends and the crowd of demons. His voice contained both resentment toward his suffering and a joy for

his reunion with his friends. 「「Kousuke!」」

「Juugo! Kentaro! I called for help!」

“I called for help.” Reacting to these words, Kouki and the woman came to their senses. They stared at Hajime and the two girls again.

However, Hajime did not seem to particularly care as he gave

instructions to Yue and Shea as if he thought the whole matter was a nuisance.

「Yue, sorry, but defend everyone here. Shea, the man in knight’s armor over there, please check up on him.」

「Mm… Leave it to me.」「Roger!」

Yue calmly walked, ignoring the demons around them, and Shea jumped over the demons and landed next to Commander Meld.

「Ha, Hajime-kun…」

Kaori again called Hajime’s name in a trembling voice. Though her voice carried a joy in their meeting, it included her grief as well. Hajime had returned from what everyone thought was his death. Though Kaori did not know his circumstances, she hoped he would have been able to escape, she wanted to see him again.

Hajime simply shrugged his shoulders as he looked at Kaori, and said 「It’s fine, so stay there.」Hajime activated “Light Speed,” causing his perception ability to improve explosively, and took out three cross bits from “Treasure Warehouse,” placing them around Kaori and Shizuku like a shield.

Suddenly seeing cross-shaped objects float in space, Kaori and Shizuku's eyes staggered. Hajime turned his back to them and arrogantly spoke to the woman… she was not yet Hajime's enemy, so he had mercy on her.

「Woman with red hair. I won't chase after you if you leave right now. If you don't want to die, disappear quickly.」

「… What was that?」

Those were not the words of someone surrounded by demons. Even so, she asked back on reflex. On the other hand, Hajime repeated himself in surprise.

「Quick judgment is needed on the battlefield. If you don't want to die, then disappear. Understand?」

Understanding that she did not mishear him, the woman's expression disappeared and she said, 「Get him.」

She pointed at Hajime and gave the demons a command to kill. This time, she lacked calmness due to the suddenness of the

situation and the loss of the Ahtod — She made a fatal mistake.

Though Hajime did not know it, the Ahtod was a powerful demon she did not want to lose, so the woman was angry at Hajime who

continued to step on it. She was confused by the impossible situation of the ceiling of the Labyrinth suddenly dropping down.

If she were her normal self, she would have made a more accurate judgment, but the die had already been cast.

「I see… I take it to mean you are an “enemy?”」 Hajime muttered as a chimera began to attack.

「Hajime-kun!」 Hearing an anxious warning from behind, Hajime grabbed and easily lifted the chimera with his artificial left arm.

The chimera raged about, trying to escape, shaking the space about it intensely. It looked at Hajime with spite.

「Hey, hey, what is this? This is an odd magic. Is this some kind of street performance?」

Hajime felt space waver as it began activating its unique magic and gave a verbal jab on instinct.

Though there were demons who could hide their presence in the Abyss, theirs was much more difficult to handle. Compared to them, this concealment skill was far too primitive.

Hajime, not budging an inch, lifted the body several hundred kilograms heavy in one hand. The woman, Kaori, and the class looked at him dumbfounded.

Hajime ignored them and put power into his artificial arm as if

saying they were not worth the notice. Then a fresh sound echoed in the room as the wavering space stopped intensely. The eagle head of the chimera suddenly appeared. It was hardly its normal magnificence, either; its head hung unmoving, its eyes slack.

「Serious, ly…」

Someone spoke hoarsely.

Hajime threw aside the dead chimera and pulled out Donner naturally. Like water flowing downhill, his actions seemed more natural than unnatural. His muzzle was aimed in space as well.

Dopan! Dopan!

His aim did not move.

A bright crimson flash tore through the sky with the dry explosive, heading toward its target. Space swung about for a moment and the brutal demon appeared with its heart pierced through, crumbling to the ground in an instant.

「Wh, why do you know…」 The woman doubted her sanity.

Hajime only snorted. For Hajime, even if they did not move, he could sense the flow of the wind, the shaking of the air and ground, the direction of a gaze, the murderous intent, the flow of magic; demons who could not conceal all signs including temperature would only be frozen targets for him.

Hajime did not take notice of the demons and stepped forth on this battlefield, no, execution ground.

This was not killing one another. This was a one-sided slaughtering from a monster from Hell that must never be antagonized.

Nagayama stared at the weapon from beyond this world which killed the female devil's demons so easily.

The demons, without stopping, executed their master's instruction to kill him faithfully and attacked him one after another.

A black cat tried to attack with a tentacle from behind. But Hajime fired Donner with a twist of his wrist without turning around and fired. The bullet surpassed the speed of sound and shattered the cat's skull.

Without being surprised, wolves sprung at him from the right and left. Before anyone realized it, Schlag had been pulled out in his left hand while Donner was in his right, blowing away the

enemies at point blank range.

Another cat lurked behind one of the wolves that had died and fired a tentacle in cooperation with a chimera who approached Hajime from behind, but it was unable to graze Hajime. However, he had fired a railgun bullet toward the ground, ricocheting it to hit the cat from below like a heavyweight boxer's uppercut.

While it was frozen in the air, Hajime used “Strong Leg” and heel dropped the Chimera straight into the cat.

With both shaken from the assault, without looking, he fired a bullet.

「Guraaaaaa」「Ooooooooo」

Brutal demons shouted and started attacking their enemy from right and left. Like the god of death’s scythe, one’s mace cut through the air. Hajime spun around and evaded to the right, causing the brutal demon to stupidly swing through the air, the

mace meeting the face of its fellow brutal demon. 「Ga!?」

It shouted in confusion. The two demons were together when a line pierced through them and they met their end.

Eight black cats ran through the air, attacking Hajime all at once, their tentacles attacking him at high speeds with tricky paths.

Hajime’s hands moved like living creatures. In the right hand, Donner shot toward the front, in the left, Schlag fired toward the back. If Donner shot right, Schlag fired left. If Donner was aimed through his armpit, Schlag was aimed straight forward. When Schlag killed the enemy to the right, Donner caused a rd flower to

appear behind. The countless railgun bullets flashed about, killing their enemy without fail.

Such was the extremity of the battle.

Unlike the swordsmanship of the Kingdom's knights which Commander Meld led, unlike the refined and unique movements of the Yaegashi School, a martial art refined over consecutive generations, his movements were coars.

But they were logical. Logical taken to the limit.

He always moved to a position in which enemies would find difficult to attack, he set his priority targets within fractions of a second, and one action always led to another without fail. This was not a battle style birthed through wisdom but a rationality perfected through overwhelming experience.

Hajime was smiling.

He was not enjoying his domination. This world was unjust. 「Kill if you can kill.」 His appearance was a declaration of war. A declaration against every imaginable difficulty, against any existence, with the determination to live, it was a smile that displayed his resolution.

The wolves and chimeras did not learn from experience and continued rushing at Hajime as he fired Donner & Schlag.

Hajime flipped about in midair as he jumped up several meters while spinning. He finished reloading Donner & Schlag in the moment the group lost sight of Hajime.

Their blood rained down like flower petals. As if aiming for the moment he landed, a brutal demon attacked with its mace.

But its attack was worthless as Hajime used “Air Walk” to jump further into the air, discharging Donner & Schlag in succession while spinning like a top.

Only a wind of unbridled murderous intent pierced through the brutal demon’s body and exploded the chimera and wolves’ heads. As deemed by inertia, they hit each other and fell.

Hajime landed silently alongside the corpses which dyed the ground red, reloading with a gunspin.

「Kyuwaaaaa,」immediately after he finished, a strange cry sounded.

When Hajime turned, Absod had opened its mouth, a pure white light filled with power aiming at Hajime.

It was the huge magic of Commander Meld’s it had stored before, “Final Loyalty.” Though it was only effective within a few meters, it was more than enough power to eliminate a person entirely.

With the magic compressed to its limits, the turtle bombarded Hajime.

The light of death gouged away the earth as it approached, but Hajime brought out a coffin-shaped shield and exercised “Strength of Gold” at the same time. There was no sign of anxiety in Hajime’s eyes, simply an indomitable will.

The moment the bombardment met his shield, a terrific roar sounded; the air trembled. However, Hajime, receiving the attack, did not move an inch; rather, he parried the attack by changing the angle of his shield, a mischievous smile on his face. The destination of this attack was…

「!? Damn it!」

It was the devil. She was fueled by a sense of crisis seeing Hajime easily kill the demons and began chanting a long aria. Hajime noticed it and deflected the Absod’s attack to obstruct her.

The woman took evasive action in a panic. As the torrent of light destroyed the wall, she desperately ran to the other side; she had no room to relax from her expression.

However, it was as if he expected this when he deflected the attack. At that time, the Absod’s energy was drained and the bombardment ended.

「Tch…」

The woman did not have room to relax as Hajime clicked his tongue. She was covered in cold sweat, relieved that the attack ended, but she froze the next moment.

A shock and a heat wave passed by her right cheek as something white scattered.

They were the remains of the white crow demon. Hajime would not let things go as she wanted and fired Schlag at Absod and Donner at the white crow.

The Absod avoided the high -velocity bullet, recognizing the attack would bring it an eternal darkness.

The white crow's body exploded as it died in an instant, its white wings and blood scattering about.

The woman, feeling the shock wave of the rail gun, vacantly

touched her cheek. The white crow's blood was stuck to it along with a cruel sensation of burning.

If he was only a few centimeters off… the woman trembled as she thought this.

Hajime, who stood before her, had defeated her army of demons, his strength peerless, his eyes saying he could kill them all at any time. He held her life in his hands at this very moment.

Though the woman was proud to have a mind as strong as her body, she could not stop herself from shivering at the monster in front of her.

How can such a thing exist? How can I survive? These thoughts swirled through her head.

Kouki and the others were feeling the same thing. They could not see the boy with white hair and an eye patch as Hajime, they simply saw an unknown who easily destroyed the demons who nearly annihilated them.

「What is this… who on earth are you!?」

Kouki muttered this. Everyone's minds began turning; the answer returned from one of their own, Endo.

「Ha ha, though you might not believe it… he's Nagumo.」

「「「「「「Ha?」」」」」」

Hearing Endo's words, Kouki and the others mentally collapsed together. They looked at Endo, asking 「Is his head all right?」 Endo did not feel such a reaction unbelievable and simply shrugged.

「Like I said, Nagumo, Nagumo Hajime. That day, Nagumo fell from the bridge into the Abyss. He survived and climbed up himself… Until we got here, he treated all the demons as small fry. I'm serious! I think it's weird, too… but it's true.」

「Nagumo, eh? Nagumo, you're alive!?」

Kouki muttered in astonishment. Everyone else looked at the boy who annihilated everything in front of him like a game… 「Is that really Nagumo?」 Endo understood and simply said

「Yeah, it is. Though he's seriously changed, I saw his Status Plate」 as he smiled dryly.

Everyone looked vacantly at this unrivaled Hajime. Someone then looked at Endo and began calling out in desperation.

「Th, this is a lie. Nagumo died. Right? Everyone saw it. He can't be alive! Stop lying!」

「Uwa, what's with that! I saw his Status Plate, and the person in question doesn't deny it!」

「Liar! There must be something going on! Or some kind of disguise!」

「No, what have I been saying? And anyway, what's the point in that?」

Hiyama gripped Endo's shirt in confusion. His face was pale as he denied Hajime's survival. Kondo and the others looked at his odd state.

Cold water was poured on Hiyama's head in his confusion. A large amount of water, like a small waterfall, fell on him. Hiyama had a fit of coughs, having inhaled some of the water. However, a voice colder than the water fell on his ears.

「… Calm down. You're depressing.」

Though Hiyama seemed like he would complain in anger, as soon as he met the girl's gaze, he swallowed his words. Yue looked at Hiyama with cold eyes.

Her beautiful face, like a high-class bisque doll which imitated the ideal of a girl, played no small role.

Kouki and the others were the same as they were all attracted to her face, regardless of gender. 「Howa～」Suzu let out a strange noise. It was not just her beautiful figure or her childish appearance but her bewitching atmosphere that had such impact.

At that time, the woman began issuing instructions to attack Kouki and the others. Like with Meld, she thought to use them as hostages. It was a standard trick that Hajime could easily see through.

Suzu moved to act as their shield. Her body began to scream as she tried to use magic. Though she bit her lip to try and keep from losing consciousness… Yue gently stopped her with her

hands. 「Hoe?」Suzu called out as Yue quietly pat her head, stopping her aria on reflex.

「… It's fine.」

Yue's words were without ground to Suzu, but still she thought 「Ah, I'm safe now」and lost strength in her body. Though she did not understand why she accepted Yue's words so easily, she felt as if Yue was a dependable older sister who could defend her.

Yue's gaze moved from Suzu to the claws, teeth, tentacles, maces, and gazes of the demons. And with a single phrase, activated her magic.

「“Azure Dragon.”」

In that instant, a blue sphere, 1 meter in diameter, appeared above the heads of Yue and the others. It was a Supreme Rank Fire Magic, a blue flame, “Azure Sky.”

She had cast it without even chanting an aria. The rear-line was especially dumbfounded as they stared up at the blue sphere.

However, what surprised them most occurred next. It changed shape to a snake which burned brightly and undulated. It swallowed the brutal demons in an instant and turned them to ashes.

The blue flame swam through the air and took its final shape shortly after.

It took the shape of a dragon with blue scales.

It was 30 meters in length which coiled about the class to defend them, centering on Yue.

The demons running at them came to a halt, unable to approach the blue hellfire which wrought destruction.

Goaaaaa!!!

With a roar, the faltering demons were subjected to the sensation of gravity and jumped into the dragon’s mouth, one after another.

Though they desperately struggled in the air, they panicked, unable to understand the situation. Those who were not burned before were forced to jump into the creature's maw, leaving only their ashes behind.

「What, this magic…」

Someone muttered. This magic which no one held knowledge of burned the demons one after another. Kouki and the others could no longer speak.

This magic was an original Compound Magic, similar to "Thunder Dragon," which utilized Gravity Magic with a Supreme Rank Fire Magic; it was a magic of the Age of Gods.

Incidentally, the reason she used "Azure Dragon" and not "Thunder Dragon" was because Yue was using it to train. "Thunder Dragon" combined Gravity Magic with an Advance Rank Wind Magic. "Azure Dragon" had a simple power but was more difficult to control. She had only recently been able to control this magic.

Naturally, Kouki and the others did not know this, and they wanted to request she explain things to them as the caster.

However, their spines straightened when they saw the dragon move to the calm Yue and were unable to speak.

Yue was like a goddess to them, and many had already lost their hearts to her… Suzu, in particular, seemed to cry out in joy.

On the other side, the woman, seeing the “Azure Dragon” from a distance, cursed it as “just a monster.” She changed her target in frustration to the two girls huddled up by Meld and the rabbit girl.

However, she was exposed to something more unreasonable at this point.

Shea used the Drücken to blow away an attacking brutal demon’s head like a pinball as she rotated like a top, crushing the skull of a wolf in the meantime.

A chimera and black cat attacked Kaori and Shizuku once again But before it could reach them, a cross bits surrounding them

scattered their urge to pounce and kept them at bay. While Shizuku was shaken by the mysterious crosses which

moved on their own to protect her, one turned its tip toward the chimera which let out a roar. 「Seriously?」 Shizuku cried out as she heard a metallic object fall to the ground. A similar

sound could be heard by Kaori.

Shizuku and Kaori turned their eyes toward the sounds despite the incoming demons — and were surprised by what created them.

「This is… a cartridge?」 「Cartridge… from a gun?」

While Kaori and Shizuku were not knowledgeable, they were convinced seeing Hajime go on a rampage with a gun in each hand. The cross shaped objects floating about to defend them were all long-range weapons.

「A, amazing… Hajime-kun can use FunOel.」「He, he seriously belongs in New Oype…」

Shizuku and Kaori, having gained some room to relax despite the surrounding demons, let out a verbal jab; in all actuality, Hajime heard this via the cross bits. While confused as to why the two had knowledge about this skill he forged with Yue and the others, he ignored it.

「Really… what is this?」

The woman muttered powerlessly. She had held everything down with power just minutes before, but that was all crushed. With this injustice, resignation filled her mind. There were barely any demons remaining; victory and defeat were clear.

She had one last chance! She shot a magic toward Hajime and would escape through one of the exits. The magic was “Fallen Prison.”

Hajime looked at the approaching gray globe and ignored its threat. Immediately before reaching him, it exploded, engulfing him in a smoke of petrifaction. The class held their breath, and Kaori and Shizuku called out Hajime’s name.

The woman reached the exit, ignoring the class. But…

「Ha ha… So this was already checkmate.」「Exactly.」

A cross floated inside the passage the woman ran to, its dark muzzle pointing to her. She laughed dryly; she had been in

checkmate the moment Hajime appeared. She let out a dry laugh as a calm, detestable voice called to her from behind.

The woman looked back in resignation and saw Hajime appear from the smoke with no signs of petrifaction. He swept it away with a wave of his hand, a bright crimson wave appearing with his gesture, as he used “Magic Radiation.”

「… You monster. Ignoring an Advance Rank magic like that, are you really Human?」

「Actually, I’m doubtful of that myself. But turning into a monster like this isn’t so bad, is it?」

While the woman kept some distance, Hajime seemed to joke with her. Seeing the demons completely annihilated in the room behind her, she once again said,「monster.」

Hajime ignored her and aimed the muzzle of Donner at her. She realized it was her time of death.

「Now, at a time like this, I suppose I should ask if you have anything to say… unfortunately, I have no desire to hear such pointless things. So, what's a devil doing in a place like this…? Where did you get all these demons… won't you tell me?」

「You think I would talk? So Humans can get stronger? Don't take me for a fool.」

Hajime calmly looked at the woman as she responded to him in ridicule. He fired Donner at the woman's foot without hesitation.

「Agaaa!!」

The woman screamed and fell to the floor. The breathing of the demons in the room had finally gone completely silent and only her screams could be heard. Hajime's classmates took a deep breath seeing his merciless actions; but he did not worry about it and spoke again.

「Humans, Devils, I don't care about what's going on in your world. I'm not asking as a Human, I'm asking because I want to

know. Hurry up and answer me.」「…」

The woman grit her teeth until they hurt as she stared at Hajime.

Seeing her eyes, Hajime realized she would not talk, so he began talking on his own.

「Well, I have a rough idea. You came here to conquer the “True Great Labyrinth,” right?」

The woman knit her eyebrows hearing Hajime’s words. Hajime continued speaking while carefully observing the situation.

「Control of those demons is a product of Age of the Gods Magic… bull’s eye, right? I’m guessing the Devils wants to conquer the Labyrinths so they can get Age of the Gods Magic … and since the Hero Party is doing the same, you were trying to invite them…」

「How could you… impossible…」

Hajime’s guess was dead on. The woman’s face was mortified; it was understandable she was suspicious. Still, seeing his strength and his knowledge, she could guess how he came into existence. Seeing her face, Hajime simply said 「Correct answer.」

「I see. If it’s like that place… I can also understand how you got that strength… Honestly, hurry up and kill me. I won’t stand to become a prisoner…」

「Like that place… huh? Then that means you’ve conquered at least one Labyrinth then…」

The woman’s expression said she would commit suicide if she were to be captured. If she could not fight, she wanted to die. Because Hajime heard enough information, murderous intent appeared in his eyes as he thought to end her life.

The woman threw her final words at him. 「Some day, my lover will kill you.」

Hearing those words, Hajime smiled fearlessly.

「I will kill even the gods if they declare themselves my enemy. Those who are dancing to their tune won't be enough to reach me.」

They had no reason to speak any further. Hajime aimed Donner at the woman's head.

But the moment he was about to pull the trigger, someone yelled

to stop him.

「Wait! Stop, Nagumo! She can't fight! Calm down, you don't

need to kill her!」「…」

「What's this guy saying? 」Hajime looked over his shoulder curiously. Kouki stood up having recovered a little bit, and spoke further in an unsteady voice.

「Take her captive. It's not good to kill someone who isn't resisting. I'm a Hero. Because you are my companion, please, stop here.」

Hajime wanted to complain, but instead of responding, he silently… pulled the trigger.

A dry explosion echoed. The woman died in an instant.

Silence wrapped the area. The class took a deep breath. Despite seeing someone's head blown away, they were confused. Kaori was the most shocked amongst them.

I won't let anyone die. Kaori had that determination when she came to this world and fought. As for the demons in the Labyrinth… they were combat exercises.

Her job was on the back lines, and it was her determination to never let Kouki or Shizuku die when confronted with an enemy; no matter how bloody her friends' hands were, she had never given it a thought, at least until this moment.

Kaori was shocked to see Hajime murder someone without any sense of aversion, disgust, or hesitation. He killed someone as if it were as natural as breathing.

The Hajime she knew, even if he had no means to resist, was a gentle yet strong person who could jump into trouble for others.

His "strength" was never violent. His "strength" was his "sympathy for others." His lack of resistance in killing an enemy who had no will to fight was far too different from the Hajime she knew.

Shizuku understood Kaori's intense shock as her best friend. Shizuku looked calmly at Hajime. Though she knew he had

changed a lot, she still wanted to complain about his actions; even so, she did not understand his circumstances, so she knew it would be futile. All she could do was draw close to Kaori.

Naturally, the lump of justice could not keep quiet. Kouki's subdued voice filled the silence.

「Why, why did you do it? Why did you need to kill her…」
Hajime noticed Kouki's gaze at the edge of his vision and

hesitated on how to answer for a moment, but he caught sight of Shea and walked toward her, deciding to ignore Kouki.

He walked to Shea who remained by Meld's side while ignoring Kouki who spoke with a subdued tone.

Yue, feeling no more need to guard Kouki and the others, walked toward Hajime. Suzu, behind her, called out 「Ahh, Onee-sama!」 in a small voice.

「Shea, how is Meld's condition?」

「He's in a dangerous state. Even a little later and he wouldn't have lived… we used "Holy Water," but… was that okay?」「Yeah, I'm indebted to this man. The hole left behind if Meld

disappears here is large in a number of ways. It could be troublesome if someone weird took charge of the Hero. It seems

Meld hasn't finished teaching them… regardless, he's a good man. I'd have regrets if I let him die.」

Hajime spoke his reasons for using Holy Water as a sort of compromise to Ryuutarou and the classmates who stood scowling at him. Also, by "someone weird," he meant someone like Ishtar of the Saint Church.

「… Hajime.」

「Yue. Thanks for coming with me.」「Yeah.」

Yue arrived as he finished speaking to Shea. Yue looked up to Hajime who gently touched her cheek while thanking her. Her eyes were saying "Don't mind it." Hajime's eyes softened as well.

「… You two, read the air… break out of your delirium!」

With how easily the two drifted into their own world, one could call them sick, but, with a clap of Shea's hands, they returned to normal.

Hajime felt the number of gazes with a different meaning from before increase amongst Kouki's group. This was particularly true from Kouki himself.

「Hey, Nagumo. Why did she have to…」

「Hajime-kun… there are a lot of things I would like to hear, but how did you save Meld-san? His wounds have closed up and his

breathing is stable. It was a fatal wound, too… 」

Kouki's words of cross-examination were interrupted by Kaori who was on her knees by Meld's side, her face earnest as she asked for more details.

Hajime turned to Kaori who seemed a little cold. After some thought, he answered her question. As for her casually calling him "Hajime-kun"… he decided to ignore it for now.

「 Ah, that … I have a special medicine. It can recover someone from a near-death state in an instant. 」

「 Th, that medicine, what is it? 」

「 Well, it's somewhat legendary… it's not normal to have it. Yaegashi, you should be healed magically. I'll give you some magic recovery medicine, too. 」

「 Y, yeah… thanks. 」

Shizuku, who spoke to Hajime, stammered as she retrieved the medicine having felt a gap in his etiquette with the Hajime in her memories. Hajime, not minding Shizuku's reaction, handed Kaori magic recovery medicine as well. With a word of thanks, Kaori drank up the contents. Her energy recovered little by little. As long as she recovered, the class could be healed.

Kaori, not needing to worry about Meld for now, sighed in relief. Kouki spoke again.

「Hey, Nagumo, I'm thankful for what you did for Meld-san, but why…」

「Hajime- kun. Thank you for helping Meld-san. For helping us as well… thank you.」

Again, Kouki was interrupted by Kaori. Kouki had a delicate expression.

Still, Kaori ignored him and looked only at Hajime. Though Hajime's change brought an intense shock to her, she still wanted to convey her gratitude. She wanted to thank Hajime for helping Meld and themselves.

With a lump in her throat, she grasped her clothes with her hands, unable to hold back her tears.

She could not keep her sobbing in check seeing Hajime in front of her and not as an illusion. Hajime quietly looked down at her.

「Hajime-kun… you're alive, gusu, thank you. That time, I couldn't defend you… Hic… I'm sorry…」

It was not just Shizuku, the girls sympathized with Kaori's feelings and looked at her warmly; Kondo and many of the others looked bitter, and Kouki and Ryuutarou, who did not understand her feelings, stared blankly. Shizuku, in the meantime, was looking at Kouki and Ryuutarou who were truly insensitive.

「Muu, could this be a new rival?」Shea said with a difficult face. Yue watched Kaori expressionlessly.

Hajime, seeing Kaori cry before him like this, realized that, as Endo had told him before, Kaori had been worrying about him all this time.

To be frank, Yue had once been told of Kaori when she and Hajime were down in the Abyss, but she had completely forgotten about the girl until they met Aiko in 【Ul.】She felt a little guilty seeing such strong emotions of guilt.

Hajime, with an embarrassed expression, responded to Kaori with a wry smile.

「… How should I say this, sorry I didn't get in touch immediately. I just wanted to get away from this place as quickly as possible… you don't need to apologize… um, how should I put this, you don't need to cry.」

Kaori saw the same tenderness in Hajime's eyes as the night when he said 「Please protect me.」

Seeing this, she recalled the night they made a promise, and Kaori felt a lump in her throat. She burst into tears unintentionally and jumped into his chest.

Hajime was at a loss for what to do and held his hands up as Kaori cried into his chest. If it were his other classmates, he would call them gloomy and kick them repeatedly like some kind of yakuza; it was hard to think he might react otherwise with how they treated him before he fell into the Abyss.

But with Yue by his side, he hesitated to embrace another woman closely. As such, he held his hands up like someone at gunpoint. It was very unlike Hajime.

From the side, Shizuku's eyes were saying 「You made my best friend cry! Hold her!」but it was not so simple for him to move because Yue was silently gazing at him.

Reluctantly, he patted her head lightly. It was an unusually worthless action for Hajime.

「… Kaori, you're really kind. Crying because you found out a classmate is alive… but Nagumo killed someone who wasn't resisting. I need to talk, so get away from him.」

The Nagayama Party glared at Kouki as if saying 「You, read the air!」To the very end, he did not realize Kaori's feelings. While staring at Hajime in accusation, he was trying to separate the two.

He did not do much, though, perhaps out of an impending sense of crisis which could lead to his murder, or perhaps because he did not want to carelessly touch Kaori… or maybe both.

「Hey, Kouki! Nagumo-kun helped us, didn't he? Why are you saying that to him?」

「But Shizuku, she had already lost her will to fight. There was no need to kill her. I can't forgive what Nagumo did.」

「Listen, Kouki, why won't you stop? You always…」 Shizuku's eyes looked up hearing Kouki's objection. The

classmates were flustered, but Hiyama, who did not like Hajime in the first place, began to support him.

Gradually, they began to argue about Hajime's actions. Kaori had

separated from Hajime and wiped her tears. She was shocked and fell silent, lost in thought.

At that time, a voice poured cold water on them. Figuratively, this time.

「… What worthless people. Hajime, can we go?」 「Ah, yeah, sure.」

Yue's absolute zero voice cut them short as she called Kouki and the others "worthless." Though her voice was small, it cut through to all of them. In an instant, the surroundings turned silent as they stared at her.

Hajime, hearing about Kaori from Endo, came down to fulfill his promise with her, and he had accomplished his obligation. Hajime followed Yue who was pulling his hand, followed closely by Shea who was worrying about the people around them.

Seeing this, Kouki could not hold back any longer.

「Please wait. I haven't finished. If I don't hear your intentions, we can't be companions. Actually, who are you? I'm thankful that you helped us, but to call us worthless on a first meeting…

isn't that a bit rude? What exactly is worthless about us?」「…」

Kouki, as always, said a remark filled with his justice; however, saying such a thing in this situation made one want to wonder how he turned out this way. It might have been something of a curse by this point in time.

Yue seemed to have abandoned Kouki, she did not even spare a glance at him, let alone speak. Kouki frowned in irritation seeing Yue's attitude, but he soon smiled gently as he tried talking to her again.

Thinking it would be more trouble than it was worth for Yue, Hajime let out a sigh and decided to answer.

「Amanogawa. There are so many jokes I want to make about that sense of justice you have which seems to be the meaning of your existence; since it seems you would stick to me otherwise, I'll give you a few pointers.」

「Pointers? What did I say wrong? I said what was natural as a person.」

Feeling it was troublesome to the very depths of his heart, Hajime looked at Kouki, struggling to keep his displeasure down.

「Stop deceiving yourself.」「What are you saying…」

「You aren't angry because I killed the woman. You're unhappy to see someone die. But she was trying to kill us, blaming me for killing that woman who murdered the other knights, you're knocking on the wrong door. As for your stance… what was it, killing someone who wasn't resisting? I forced you to see something you didn't want to see… I accomplished what you couldn't do easily. Now you can spread your justice. Well, I suppose you're not consciously doing that. That part of you still hasn't changed. You interpret things to your convenience as if it were as natural as breathing.」

「N, no! Stop saying selfish things! You killed someone who wasn't resisting!」

「Is it bad to kill an enemy?」

「Wha!? You just murdered someone! Of course it's bad!」

「Haa, is there no talking to you? I guess I need to put it this way

— I won't pardon anyone hostile to me. Unless there is a clear reason, when I fight, I fight to the death. Good and evil are unrelated. I showed a moment of naivety and barely avoided death, I understood at that time. These are the values I cultivated in the

Abyss, I won't force them on you. Well, if you find it truly disgusting, you're more than welcome to try and stop me… 」

Hajime closed the distance in an instant and pressed the muzzle against Kouki. At the same time, he used "Overpower" with a dense killing intent toward everyone around them.

Kouki held his breath. Even if he could perceive how the fastest amongst them, Shizuku, moved, he could not tell how Hajime moved at all; he trembled.

「 Remember this, even if we were classmates before, I will not

hesitate to kill you. 」 「 Y, you… 」

「 Are you misunderstanding something? I didn't come back to join you, and I'm not your friend. I only came here because I made a promise with Shirasaki. Once we're out of here, we part ways. I have my own road to follow. 」

After saying that much, Kouki could only swallow his saliva. Hajime released the effects of "Overpower" and placed Donner in its holster, causing many people to breathe in relief. Though the class looked at Hajime with a complex gaze, Kouki could still not consent and tried to argue; however, he was stopped by Yue's harsh words.

「 … It was Hajime that fought. A dog who lost to his fears and ran away has no right to speak. 」

「 Wha, saying I ran away… 」

In all actuality, it was not a coincidence that Hajime fell at the place he did. He felt a torrent of magical power as they traveled on the floors above and guessed Kouki had done something. Making full use of his perception abilities, he read the signs below and shot the pile bunker downward.

The surge of magic he felt was Kouki's "Supreme Dominance." Hajime knew from the magic power he felt that Kouki would be able to defeat the devil. Even so, Kouki hesitated to murder her and brought about their predicament. That was why Yue said he "lost to his fears."

When Kouki tried to argue with Yue, a voice interrupted him.
「Stop, Kouki.」

「Meld-san!」

Commander Meld came to and had heard their conversation. He got up shakily and looked in puzzlement at his abdomen which should have been injured.

Kaori gave a concise explanation to Commander Meld. After hearing that he was healed miraculously with a rare medicine and after hearing Hajime was alive, he looked happy from the depths of his heart.

While thanking Hajime for saving his life, he lay prostrate, apologizing that he could not help Hajime before. Hajime knelt on the ground and accepted his apology.

Hajime seemed to have not worried about it at all. Though he forgot Commander Meld had told him "I will definitely help you"…

seeing Commander Meld apologize so deeply, he read the air and responded accordingly.

After he finished speaking to Hajime, he looked at Kouki and apologized in a similar manner.

「M, Meld-san? Why are you apologizing?」

「It's natural. I am your teacher… yet I did not teach you something important as a person who fights. The resolution to kill. When the time came, I was going to give you the experience of killing someone by finding a thief… it is a necessity if you wish to fight against Devils… but we spent a lot of time together, spoke a lot, to force you to have that experience… I hesitated. As the leader of the knights, I should have taught you earlier… A little later, just a little longer, if they can just clear this… I was indecisive. It was my mistake as your educator. As a result, you nearly died… I am sorry.」

As he said this, Commander Meld bowed deeply again; the class tried to comfort him in a hurry. Apparently, he had been quite worried about all of them; his desire as a person interfered with his mission as the leader of the knights.

Commander Meld was a person of the Kingdom and a believer in the Saint Church. It was not odd that he honored "God's Apostles." However, he felt doubt in Kouki's ability to fight; he was too kind and naive as Hajime had pointed out.

Hearing Commander Meld's thoughts, Kouki remained silent. Being told it was necessary to kill someone, Kouki recalled his fear as he tried to cut the woman down. At the same time, he was shocked to

hear Commander Meld intended to have him kill a thief, even if it was for training. Since he had the power to overwhelm the thief…

On the other hand, Kaori remained silent. It was not because of

Commander Meld's words; she had been thinking about Hajime's words this entire time.

The sense of values he cultivated in the Abyss, he would kill an enemy without hesitation, even if they were a former classmate … These were not words the old Hajime would say. However, his killing intent before was serious. The kind Hajime which would protect others with his body would no longer hesitate to kill even them. Kaori was confused by the difference in the old Hajime she knew and the Hajime in her presence. Hajime's sense of worry before, was it a mistake on her part? She felt uneasy.

When Kaori thought of this, she felt the unexpected weight of someone's eyes. Kaori looked about and saw the girl with a beautiful face and fair hair. She was unexpectedly observing Kaori with unfeeling eyes.

Which reminded Kaori, the girl was on fairly intimate terms with Hajime. The two stared at each other for a while.

「… Fuu.」「… 」

However, Yue seemed to look at her in ridicule.

Kaori inhaled on reflex; she understood the meaning. 「If you're shaken by this, then forget Hajime.」

Naturally, Yue understood how Kaori felt about Hajime from her attitude. Even if he fell into the Abyss, she believed in his survival and worked hard. I'll take you on! Yue secretly thought.

However, she saw Kaori confused and anxious about the difference between the old and the current Hajime. This was a natural reaction for a person… seeing this, Yue considered her to be a worthless opponent.

You can't be with him. From now on, Hajime… is mine. I am "special" to Hajime…! This clear declaration caused Kaori's face to go red. Was it anger or embarrassment? Kaori could not argue that she was losing sight of the human being called Nagumo Hajime. In their first encounter, Yue was the victor.

Ignoring Kouki and the others as well as the delicate atmosphere, Hajime collected the pile bunker and began walking out with Yue and Shea.

Noticing this, Kouki followed after Hajime. Since everyone was worn out, Endo suggested they take advantage of Hajime as he left. Meld asked and Hajime consented.

As they journeyed above ground, Hajime easily took care of the demons who had been hidden. Once again, the class was amazed by the strength of the man they once called "Incapable."

Hiyama stared at Hajime with a pale expression while Kondo and the others sent looks of jealousy. Nagayama had a complicated expression; though he was clearly not a friend, he still had a sense of admiration.

The boys shirked back seeing Hajime's strength. They all felt guilty since they ignored Hajime when he was being bullied by Hiyama. It was unavoidable that he did not consider any of them friends.

Hajime led the way, ignoring the various gazes from the class. Along the way, Suzu and the girls began talking to Yue, asking

about Hajime and her; realizing they were being ignored, they began talking to Shea, asking about her breasts and rabbit ears, but were quickly stopped physically by Shizuku. Kondo and the boys began talking to Yue and Shea, complete with ulterior motives, but were completely ignored. After much annoyance, Hajime shot a rubber-coated bullet and kicked him when he tried to touch Shea's rabbit ears without permission, letting out a small amount of his true thirst for blood to hammer in the fear — at last, they reached the ground.

Kaori, still worried, was looking down. Shizuku anxiously drew close to Kaori; however, she could not relieve the shock. Shizuku could not overlook the girl who sent her heart to Hajime.

The moment they reached the entrance to 【Orcus Great Labyrinth,】

「Ah! Papa!!」

「Mu! Myuu?」

A small girl who called Hajime Papa appeared.

Amongst the clamor of adventurers and merchants, Myuu's energetic voice surpassed it all. The busy professionals al looked at her with a soft smile.

Sutetetete! While making cute footsteps, Myuu ran straight up to Hajime and jumped at him with all her power. It seemed she never failed to believe Hajime would return.

Normally, anyone would writhe in pain receiving a quick head butt from a girl jumping with full force into the abdomen, but, unfortunately, Hajime's body was not that weak. Rather, he completely reduced the impact so as not to injure Myuu and firmly caught her.

「Myuu, you came? Where's Tio?」

「Yeah. Tio Onee-chan said it was about time for Papa to come back. That's why we came. Tio Onee-chan is…」

「Over here.」

A beautiful woman with black hair and gold eyes spoke up. Needless to say, the person was Tio. Hajime looked at her in annoyance, thinking it would not be unusual for Myuu to be lost in such a crowd.

「Hey, hey, Tio. Don't separate from Myuu in a place like this.」

「She is within my sight. There were a few impolite fellows. I did not wish to show Myuu such a frightening scene.」

「I see. That's fine then… so? Where are those suicidal idiots?」

「No, Master. Calm down, they are still around us.」

「… Tch, whatever.」

「… You really are overprotective of that girl, hmm? 」 Hajime, hearing the criminals' whereabouts, smiled darkly but was chastised by Tio who noticed his true intent. Though Hajime disliked being called Papa from the very depths of his heart, he was completely acting the role. When the time came for them to part when they reached Erisen, he was unsure how easily he could do it… Hajime felt more anxious than

Myuu.

His classmates stared in blank surprise hearing the conversation between Hajime and Tio. Though they understood that Hajime somehow got strong beyond belief in these past 4 months through his experiences, everyone was dumbfounded,

「Impossible, he's a father!」 The boys especially glanced at Yue and Shea and the beautiful woman with black hair and large breasts who suddenly showed up, saying 「What on earth happened!」 obviously suspecting them. Perhaps their surprise was stronger here than their surprise at his unfathomable strength.

Thinking about it rationally, it was impossible to have a 4 year old child within 4 months, but due to the numerous impacts which came in succession, they could not help but have a misunderstanding.

One person walked forward from the dazed class. Her eyes were not smiling at all though her face was… It was Kaori. Hajime's eyes opened widely as Kaori pushed forward.

「Hajime-kun! What is the meaning of this!? Is this really your child!? Who gave birth to it!? Yue-san!? Shea-san!? Or maybe this woman with black hair!? It can't be, maybe someone else!? How many people have you impregnated!? Tell me! Hajime-kun!」

Kaori held the collar of Hajime's neck and began shaking him. Hajime wanted to pull away while saying it was all a

misunderstanding, but she seemed to have an odd strength at this time and he could not escape. From behind, someone yelled 「Kaori, calm down! That can't be his child!」 Though Shizuku was admonishing her, she did not seem to hear it.

In the meantime, voices could be heard in the surroundings.

「What's this? A fight?」

「Looks like he had a child with another woman?」

「It doesn't look like just one or two people.」

「Conceiving with five people at the same time?」

「No, I heard those people who have a harem can do that with dozens of people at a time, right?」

「But it looks like he hid it from his wife.」

「I see… so he was found out today.」

「Harem, huh… I'm jealous.」



「You know… he should just die.」

Apparently everyone settled on the thought that Hajime had impregnated dozens of women and, despite being a married man, had become a devil with a harem which he hid from his wife. Hajime looked up at the sky and sighed while patting his head as

Kaori shook him. Myuu simply stood to the side with her head tilted in confusion.

Kaori was blushing, her face in Shizuku's chest in shame. After calming down, she noticed how impossible her thoughts were and the seriousness of the situation. Shizuku simply patted her, saying 「It's fine～ there there.」She was completely playing the mother role… No, it is best to stop with that.

Hajime left the gate entrance to report the completion of his duties to Roa at the branch office. All within a day, his stock in the guild went up while his social evaluation took a plummet. He decided to quickly leave town. Originally, he only came to deliver a letter from Iruwa to Roa, he did not need to replenish his supplies, so there would be no problem if he left immediately.

The class followed after Hajime because Kaori followed him. Though she was writhing in agony in shame, she was constantly thinking to herself. Did she want to separate from Hajime, did she want to follow him, she wanted to follow her feelings if she could. She did not want to separate with him after they met again at last.

However, she had a sense of guilt from separating from Kouki's group, especially since Hajime had changed so much. She had been ridiculed as well, her agitation having been seen through.

Kaori also knew Yue's feelings for Hajime were strong.

Her heart hurt knowing Hajime thought of Yue as special. It was a thorn in her mind. The two thought dearly of each other.

「Your feelings were only this strong.」Thinking of that, Kaori doubted herself.

Her yearning lost to Yue since she desired the past Hajime. Could she really look at Hajime today? Could she look at the present Hajime or could she only look at the past?

Before Yue's dignified atmosphere… Kaori was overwhelmed. In short, as a woman, as a magic user, and in her desire for

Hajime, Kaori lost her confidence.

Finally, Hajime was about to leave, a threatening air drifting toward the others. Kaori, finally noticing, looked up and noticed ten men surrounding them.

「Hey, hey, what are you doing? Getting our buddy dirty here, and no signs of apology? Huh!?」

A man with a dirty appearance and weapons looked lustfully at Tio. Apparently he was a companion of the people who tried to kidnap Myuu, and he came to retaliate in revenge. Given his appearance, however, he was here for more than just that.

Hajime placed his hand on his temple and looked at the man in amazement. The mercenary's words showed he was getting carried away.

Their gazes seemed to lick Yue and Shea up and down, making Shea feel disgust from the depths of her heart. They mistook Yue, who stood behind Hajime, to be a frightened girl and began enclosing them.

「Brat! You understand, right? If you don't want to die, leave the women and go. What~ Think of it as an apology!」

「What, I'm sure you've already broken them in~」

Gya ha ha, the men began to laugh. Myuu was frightened, being the object of others' desires, furthermore, the Rabbit Clan was often used as tools to vent sexual frustration, so their fate was already decided.

As usual, the employment of so many mercenaries brought about a confusion and certain pressure. Kouki was unable to bear hearing their remarks and was about to call out in anger, but Hajime remained calm and looked to the men without minding it.

Since they were simply talking and did not yet start a fight, he

could not panic and respond with violence. Then again, getting on all fours to apologize did not suit him, either.

Even so, Hajime did not intend to let them speak any further. Having treated Shea like a sexual toy was enough to make him lose his temper, but having frightened Myuu with their malice as well made him decide to give them a life more painful than death.

Hajime relaxed further and unhesitatingly shot their symbol of manhood.

Seeing such a merciless counterattack, Kouki and the others pulled back. The boys especially turned pale and held their hands at their groin.

Disregarding this, Yue and the others walked up to Hajime.

「Like always, you're without mercy～ As expected of you, Master. Though they were the enemy of all women, did you have some sympathy for them?」

「He controlled his anger better than usual～ It must be because of Myuu-chan, right? He's really overprotective of her.」

「… Mm, I think so too… He was angry for Shea, too.」

「Eh!? You were angry for me? E he he, Hajime-san… thank you～」

「… As always, you see through me right away, Yue.」「Mm… of course. I always look at Hajime.」

「Yue…」「Hajime…」

In the end, Hajime and Yue entered their own little world. Shea, like usual, tried to break it up, and Myuu simply jumped at Hajime without a care. Tio was ever the pervert, going Haa, Haa.

Kaori stared at Hajime who was holding Myuu and surrounded by the girls.

The scene from a moment ago.

Hajime would not hesitate to use violence which differed greatly from how he was before. On the face of things, this seemed to deny the gentle Hajime that once was.

However, the anger he held was gone. The girls were happily smiling as they drew close to Hajime.

He really had not lost his kindness, otherwise he would not be surrounded by such smiles. A child would not adore him like a father.

And though she was shaken by his change, Hajime had originally entered the Labyrinth to give a sense of relief to Kaori by showing her he was still alive. He kept his promise. And though he dove into the Labyrinth for her, he did not ignore the others. He saved Meld and defended her companions.

Kaori saw it. To protect someone else, he would not hesitate to use violence, nor would he would not forgive his enemies. Of course, her life might not be included in his own, but he was thinking about others. The smiles of the women surrounding him proved that.

Kaori imagined. Hajime lost his hair color. He had neither his right eye nor his left arm. He must have survived a severe situation beyond her imagination. He must have nearly been broken both mentally and physically many times. No, it was possible…

that he had changed because his mind had been broken. Even so, Hajime walked down a path surrounded by smiling faces.

The haze in Kaori's head disappeared. It was as if she found the missing piece of the puzzle. What was the point in hesitating? "Hajime" was before her. There was a boy she had in her mind. While he was called "Incapable," he crawled up from the depths of the Abyss. He was someone who gained so much strength.

There were parts of him that had changed and parts which had not. But that was natural. Time and experience change a person. What was there to fear? Why should she lose confidence in herself?

If there was something she did not know, she could learn it by being by his side.

She came this far in school. She could not lose in her desires. What was wrong with wanting to be by his side! What was

wrong with going along with her desires!

Determination filled Kaori's eyes. Shizuku, by her side, loosened her cheeks seeing her best friend change. She quietly pushed her back. Kaori had more "strength" in her eyes than ever before; after nodding to Shizuku in thanks, she stepped forward to her next battlefield. Right! This was a woman's fight!

Hajime, who noticed Kaori, looked at her. He thought she was going to see them off, while Yue went 「Mu?」and took caution. Shea said 「Arara?」as she looked at Kaori curiously. Tio simply said 「Ho ho, this will be chaotic～.」

Apparently Kaori was not just sending them off; he had a bad feeling and frowned.

「Hajime-kun, will you let me come with you? No… I'll stick to you no matter what. Let's get along?」

「… Ha?」

It was not simply a greeting or farewell at all. Hajime's eyes became points and he simply made an idiotic sound on reflex. Understanding Hajime would not be able to go further in the conversation, Yue stepped forward.

「… You do not have the qualifications.」

「Qualifications? Is it our desire to be with Hajime-kun? Then do you think I'll lose to you?」

Hearing Kaori say those words so calmly, Yue went 「Mu mu」and

frowned.

Kaori firmly met Yue's gaze. Inside her eyes was a roaring flame that showed her decision. Surely, in her life, the girl of gold would be her greatest rival, but she still gazed at her head on.

Yue, receiving this gaze, her eyes slightly smiling, causing Kaori to abruptly turn to Hajime, a painful tightness in her chest. With both hands crossed as if offering a prayer, her cheeks dyed red in tension and embarrassment, she took a deep breath. A deep, long breath. However, she used this strength to spin her words. Surely, on that day when she saw Hajime prostrate in town, this desire was born.

She trembled while desperately suppressing herself and… clearly said,

「I like you.」

「… Shirasaki.」

Hajime looked into Kaori's sincere eyes and responded seriously.

「I have a woman I love. I can't respond to your feelings. That's why I won't bring you with me.」

Hearing Hajime's clear answer, Kaori looked down like she would cry for a moment while biting her lip; however, she looked up

strongly immediately after.

She nodded in understanding. Behind her determined face, she was stunned, surprised, and wanted to cry, but still, she formed her words.

「… Yes, I understand. It's Yue-san, right?」「Yes, that's why…」

「But I don't think that's a reason that I can't be by your side.」
「What?」

「Because Shea-san and Tio-san also love you, right? Shea-san is especially serious. Am I wrong?」

「… That's…」

「Hajime- kun, you have someone special to you, but you allow others by your side. I will be there, too. My feelings for you… I don't think they will lose to anyone's.」

As she said this, Kaori turned to Yue. I won't lose, even to you! No more! Kaori's strong will could be seen in her eyes. It was unmistakably a declaration of war. It was a war to take the throne of who was most "special."

Yue, who caught Kaori's gaze, smiled fearlessly.

「… Then you should come. I will show you. The difference between you and I.」

「The name is Kaori.」

「… Then you can call me Yue. Your challenge, I will accept it.」

「Fu fu, Yue. Don't cry, even if you lose, okay?」

「… Fu, fu fu fu fu fu.」

「A ha, A ha ha ha ha ha.」

In a completely different sense from Hajime, Yue and Kaori formed a world between the two of them. Hajime simply looked to the distance having suddenly received a confession. Looking at Yue and Kaori laugh, Shea and Myuu held on to him.

「H, Hajime-san! My eyes, are they going funny? I see a dragon in the thunder clouds behind Yue-san!」

「… That's normal, right? I see a demoness with sword at the ready behind Shirasaki's back.」

「Papa～! They're scary!」

「Haa, Haa, both of you… those eyes… I can't get enough.」 Seeing Yue and Kaori laughing at each other while standing at their full height, Hajime wanted to ask if they had such

characters, but since it would likely backfire, he decided to wait until things settled down. He soothed Myuu who clung to him. Conceding himself to avoid trouble truly was worthless.

However, the person who would object against Kaori's will…

would be the "Hero" Amanogawa Kouki.

「W, wait! Please wait! I don't understand. Kaori, you like Nagumo? You're going with him? Eh? What's the meaning of this? Why did things suddenly go down this route? Nagumo! What did

you do to Kaori!」

「… The hell?」

Apparently Kouki did not seem to understand that Kaori liked Hajime despite seeing what happened. Though it was only Kouki who had not noticed it, seeing Kaori act in a way beyond his thinking, he assumed Hajime did something to her. Hajime instinctively jabbed at him in the Kansai dialect.

He was completely convinced that Hajime did something to Kaori. He seemed to be prepared to fight as he looked to his Holy Sword while Shizuku simply hung her head and looked like she

was bearing with a headache.

「Kouki. Why do you think Nagumo-kun did something? Think about it calmly. Even in Japan, Kaori liked him. Otherwise, she would not have spoken to him so much.」

「Shizuku… What are you saying… that's just because Kaori is kind, wasn't she talking to Nagumo because she felt bad for him? He's not cooperative or motivated, why would Kaori like an otaku like Nagumo?」

While hearing Kouki and Shizuku's conversation, Hajime's cheek twitched; he was unexpectedly angry when told this fact to his face.

Kaori, noticing their conversation, saw the possible riot that might occur, so she spoke up.

「Kouki- kun, everyone, I'm sorry. I know I'm being selfish… but, but I want to go with Hajime -kun no matter what. That's why I will leave the party now. I'm really sorry.」

Kaori bowed deeply as she said this. The female formation, Suzu, Eri, Ayako, and Mao, were going Kyaa kyaa～ Nagayama, Endo, and Nomura, because they understood Kaori's feelings, waved her away with a bitter smile.

Naturally, Kouki could not accept her words.

「It's a lie, right? Isn't this strange? Kaori, you've been by my side for a long time, right…? It'll be the same from now on… We're childhood friends… so… it's natural you'd be with me, right, Kaori?」

「Um… Kouki-kun. It's true we're childhood friends… because of that, we spent a lot of time together, right? That was just how it naturally turned out…」

「That's right, Kaori. This isn't your decision to make alone, Kaori. Please stop it.」

Kouki spoke in blank surprise. He gazed at Hajime and felt his existence could not be allowed.

Hajime was surrounded by a beautiful woman and girls. When he thought of Kaori… dark emotions he had not felt before, appeared. On impulse, his ability to interpret things to his own

convenience ran at full power.

「Kaori. You can't go. I'm saying this for your own good. Look at Nagumo, he's got some girls serving him, even a small child…

and that rabbit girl has a slave collar. That woman with black hair called him "Master," too. It's like he's collecting women or something. He's the worst. I won't let you work with someone who would so easily murder a person. You'll only be unhappy if you go with him. So stay here. No, even if you hate me, I will stop you. I won't let you go.」

Kaori and the others were stunned by Kouki's wild objection; however, he could not stop. He looked from Kaori to Hajime and Yue and the girls.

「You too. You shouldn't be with this man anymore. Come with me. I'll welcome your ability. I can save you. Shea, too, right? Relax. I will free you from slavery if you come with me. Tio, you don't have to call him Master any longer.」

Saying this with a refreshing smile, Kouki stretched his hand forward. Shizuku looked to the sky while covering her face with her hands. As for Kaori, she simply stood with her mouth open.

The girls who received Kouki's invitation…

「「「…」」」

They were already speechless. Everyone looked away from Kouki and rubbed their arms together. Goosebumps could be seen on Yue's bare skin. In a sense, they had received quite a large amount

of damage. Even Tio said 「This feels a little wrong…」 while frowning.

Seeing Yue and the others look like this, Kouki's smile cramped up as he stretched his hand out further. Far from matching his gaze, he felt shocked as they escaped to hide behind Hajime.

His shock turned to anger. He pulled out the Holy Sword and rashly stared at Hajime. Kouki stabbed the sword into the ground and pointed at Hajime and made a declaration.

「Nagumo Hajime! Duel me! Fight bare handed! If I win, you will never approach Kaori! And you will free those girls here!」

「… Ouch, that's not good. The Hero is more of an idiot than expected. He can't see anything anymore.」

「What's with that confusing remark! Are you afraid!?」

Kouki stabbed the Holy Sword into the ground to bring the fight to hand-to-hand combat. He was sure he would not be a good match against Hajime when using weapons. Whether he was acting consciously or unconsciously… Yue and the others, as well as Kaori, were surprised by Kouki's behavior.

However, Kouki believed in his justice, raging on about how he would save his childhood friend and the girls Hajime made unhappy, not noticing the atmosphere around them. He made a reckless dash without any thought. The "envy" he felt made him act completely recklessly.

Without waiting for Hajime to consent, Kouki ran forward fiercely. Hajime let out a sigh and backed up two, three steps. Kouki

thought he was afraid to fight without weapons; despite this, even when Kouki was only a few steps away, Hajime did not react. He simply lowered his hands lazily. Kouki thought Hajime was unable to react, he was convinced of his victory. At

that moment,

「!?」

Kouki disappeared.

To be accurate, when he took his last step, putting weight into his foot so he could put all strength into his fist, he fell. It was a pitfall. When Hajime took a few steps back, he had used the magic formation in his shoes to create a hole 4 meters deep.

The pitfall instantaneously turned back into stone, swallowing Kouki. An explosion sounded from beneath. After transmuting the pitfall, he transferred a Stun Grenade, Shock Grenade, Paralysis Grenade, and Tear Gas Bomb under ground from “Treasure Warehouse.”

Most likely, underground, the shock explosion hit Kouki as he tried to run, the stun grenade blinded him, the tear gas bomb tormented his eyes and his nose, and the paralysis grenade forced him to stop moving so he could not even escape.

Hajime silently used Transmute yet again, hardening Kouki’s surroundings into stone. He left only a small air hole open so Kouki

could continue breathing.

To those looking from the side, Kouki had gotten angry alone, hated Hajime alone, and attacked him alone, yet Hajime was the one who stood while Kouki fell and disappeared… it was incredibly amusing.

「Ah～ Yaegashi. For now, it'd be good if you could unearth him later.」

「… Though there's a lot I want to say… I understand.」 Leave the troublesome Kouki to Yaegashi Shizuku! It was

something of an implicit understanding back in Japan, and now, Hajime had passed that troublesome thing to Shizuku. Shizuku sighed while covering her eyes with a hand… At this time, Hiyama and his group of three began to cause a ruckus. His reasoning was that Kaori's absence left too large a hole. With Kaori gone, someone might die. Hiyama objected and tried to persuade her to remain in a particularly fierce manner. He looked like… everything he had worked hard on for years,

which he was about to grasp in his hands, had finally fallen out of reach.

When Hiyama's group determined it would be difficult to persuade Kaori, they tried to get Hajime to remain. They were apologizing for the past, trying to get along from this point on as if there was nothing of concern.

As if they were simply dirt, Hajime had a fierce expression seeing them act so familiarly with him, while Shizuku had her own unpleasant expression. Hajime and Hiyama's eyes met up close for the first time. His eyes held some form of insanity whenever he looked at Kaori; Hajime could feel it.

Shizuku was about to admonish Hiyama and the boys for almost starting a quarrel, but Hajime decided to talk to Hiyama to confirm what happened that day. A sarcastic smile appeared on his face.

「Hey, Hiyama. Have you gotten better at Fire Magic?」

「… Eh?」

Hiyama was dumbfounded by this sudden question. However, his complexion gradually grew blue when he noticed the intent behind it.

「Wh, what are you talking about? I'm in the vanguard… and Wind Magic suits me best.」

「Hmm, I could have sworn you were good with Fire Magic.」「A, Are you sure that isn't a misunderstanding? What are you

saying, so suddenly…」

「Then maybe there's something in that system you like. Like a

Fireball. Maybe you might be able to use it on instinct?」「…」

Hiyama had gone from blue to white. Seeing his reaction, Hajime was convinced. He guessed the motives, seeing Hiyama's attitude

when trying to convince Kaori. Hajime glanced at Kaori, thinking it good she had not been attacked so far.

Hajime no longer had the desire for revenge. Though he would not forgive hostility, he had the policy of leaving others alone. Retaliating now would only give him more trouble with Kouki than it was worth. Hiyama's existence, for Hajime, was truly as worthless as a roadside pebble.

Hajime left merciless words for Hiyama, Kondo, and the oboys who had fallen into silence.

「I don't need an apology from you, I don't care about what happened in the past. For me, you're worthless. I just said that so you know. If you understand that, then get the hell away from me! You're depressing!」

They wanted to object more, but Hajime said 「Hiyama. You know what I'm talking about, right?」 with a smile across his entire face, causing Hiyama to shake and silently nod. Hiyama knew Hajime noticed what had happened before; he also understood Hajime's unexpressed intentions.

Kondo and the others looked suspiciously at Hiyama whose attitude took a sudden change. Because Hiyama was unusually quiet, they reluctantly gave up.

Finally, truly finally, it was time to leave; all the nuisances hindering Hajime from leaving were taken care of. In the short time it took Kaori to pack (Hiyama and the others tried to follow, but

Hajime used “Overpower” to stop them,) Shizuku began talking to Hajime while glancing at Ryuutarou and the others digging Kouki out.

「How should I say this… Sorry for a lot of things. Also, I need to express my gratitude. Thank you. For helping us, as well as surviving and returning to see Kaori… 」

Seeing Shizuku apologize for all the problems as well as thanking him for rescuing the group and seeing Kaori, Hajime began to smile. Shizuku looked suspiciously at Hajime who suddenly smiled, her gaze asking 「What is it? 」

「No, sorry. How should I put this… you really haven’t changed at all. Even back in Japan, you would always come up from behind to apologize and give thanks. Even in this foreign world, you do that… well, you need to watch it, or that wrinkle in your forehead will never disappear. 」

「… That’s uncalled for meddling. You’ve changed a lot, too. You have a bunch of girls with you and even someone you treat like a daughter… I never would have imagined this back in Japan. 」

「Well, I’ve only fallen in love with one of them… 」

「… This may not be my right to say it, and I’m definitely biased… but can you give Kaori a chance? 」 「… 」

Hajime did not answer. Not only could he not respond to Kaori’s feelings, he did not think she should come along. After all, he already had Yue… Why was it that the girl he was in love with gave permission for other girls to join them? Hajime could only think Yue was becoming kinder.

Shizuku, as Kaori's best friend, became annoyed seeing Hajime act as if he would not answer.

「… If you don't give her a chance, things might turn out badly for you…」

「? Bad? What's with…」

「"White-haired Executioner with an Eye Patch" I suppose?」「… What?」

「Or maybe "Revolving Destruction," or even "Outbreak?"」「Wait a minute, you, what on earth…」

「There's also "Black Tyranny" or "Transmuter of Crimson Lightning?"」

「Y, you, you can't…」

Though Hajime suspiciously looked at Shizuku who began reciting names while looking at him head-to- foot, he suddenly realized what she intended to do and turned pale.

「Fu fu fu. I'm a Hero, one of "God's Apostles." Anything I say will definitely spread, you know? It will be like a network of housewives in a rural town… So, Nagumo-kun, what nickname would you prefer? Surprisingly, you have an appearance that makes it easy to put a name to, so I'm sure the information will spread quite

widely… 」

「 Hold it, wait, how do you know that attack method! 」

「 Well, I was helping Kaori, you know? She really wanted to talk to you, so she began reading manga and watching anime and getting into subculture. I went along with her. If I recall… I believe you could be classified as “8th Grade…” 」

「 Stop! Stop, please! 」

「 Ah, that was more effective than I imagined… You’re pretty self conscious about it, aren’t you? 」

「 Y, you devil… 」

Hajime was on his knees, trembling like a newborn pup. The black history of his middle school self was revived. He recalled

memories he sealed deep within his mind.

「 Fu fu, can I ask you to look after Kaori then? 」

「 … 」

Ruinous Elegy Revival Disaster

「 Fuu, Shotgun Chaos, Rebirth Calamity… 」 「 I get it! I get it, so stop with the nicknames. 」 「 As for Kaori? 」

「 … At least, I promise not to treat her unkindly. 」

「 Yeah, that’s enough. If I go any further, you might go mad… But if you break your promise, whether it be this world or Japan, I’ll make sure a novel with you as the theme will be published. 」

「 You’re the true last boss, aren’t you? Right? 」

Hajime was at his wits' end having been dealt a severe blow to his sense of shame. Yue and the girls as well as his classmates seemed to have taken some distance. They shivered as they looked at Shizuku who had made Hajime, with his overwhelming strength, kneel before her with only words.

Pata pata, while Hajime fought against his black history, Kaori returned. She looked in surprise at Hajime who was bowing in front of Shizuku.

Yue, worried about Hajime who was on his knees while talking to Shizuku, exchanged information with Shizuku. 「Muu~,」 Yue muttered seeing Hajime taken down with simple words.

「Right those two always did seem to talk easily…」 and the two looked between Hajime and Shizuku alternately. And thus the two drew a conclusion.

Could it be, in this fight amongst women, is she the last boss?

An indescribable expression of worry appeared on Yue and Kaori's face when they finally were able to set off. Shizuku and Suzu, the Nagayama Party, and Commander Meld who had returned after making his report saw them off at the entrance to

【Horuad.】

Though a little awkward, they still expressed their wishes for safe

travels.

And when they saw Brise, they were already too tired to be surprised.

As for Kaori and Shizuku, they were mutually struggling to let their hands go; Hajime took out a sword and sheathe from Treasure Warehouse.

「This is?」

「Yaegashi, you'll need this, right? Take it. You've always been a compassionate, worldly-wise person. With Kaori gone, you'll

need something to heal yourself (mentally.) Well, this is also thanks for all the times you've helped me back in Japan.」

Shizuku took the sword Hajime handed her and slowly unsheathed it, revealing a jet-black blade which seemed to completely absorb the light around it. There was no crest, it had a slight curve, and its tip had a slight double-edge. It closely resembled the small taichi known as a kogarasumaru. While Hajime was not particularly knowledgeable when it came to blades, he produced this when training the Haulia family.

「I guarantee its strength, since it was made by compressing the world's hardest ore, and it's sharp enough where even an amateur could wave it about and still cut up steel. As for handling it… even if I don't need to say it to you, Yaegashi, please be careful.」

「… Such an incredible… of course, as expected of a Transmuter. Thank you. I will take it without reserve.」

Once, twice, Shizuku trembled as she expressed her gratitude to the point where she might even cry; Shizuku smiled honestly as she bowed. In truth, the Yaegashi style Shizuku used was naturally based around Japanese swords, so she always had a sense of incompatibility when using her skills with her previous sword. She obediently accepted his gift, her natural smile a beautiful one.

「… Last boss?」

「…Shizuku-chan.」

「Eh? What? Why are you two looking at me like that?」 Shizuku was embarrassed seeing Kaori looking troubled while Yue looked at her warily. Finally, with a good air between them, Shizuku and the others saw Hajime and the girls off as they left the town of 【Horuad.】

The weather was fine. Their destination was 【Guryuen Desert 】 where one of the other Seven Great Labyrinths, 【Guryuen Volcano,】was. With another companion and more liveliness surrounding him, Hajime's travels continued.

Epilogue

「Shit! Shit! What is this! Don't screw with me!」

Late at night, in a park in the suburbs of 【Horuad,】while throwing his fist at countless trees in the area, one man cursed in hushed tones.

The man was Hiyama Daisuke. Hiyama's eyes shook with intense hatred, fear, and anxiety. They were ugly, impure eyes that were clearly in a frenzy.

「As expected, you're like this… Well, it can't be helped. There there, your princess was stolen from you in front of others, after all, I suppose?」

A voice, containing more than enough sarcasm and a little bit of sympathy called out from behind Hiyama. Hiyama turned around, looking relieved at who it was. While grasping his fist, he groaned like a beast and responded to the person.

「Shut it! Shit! This… Who could have guessed he was alive! How could this have happened…」

「I came to talk, since it's not like you're the only one confused, got it? It will be difficult making a good excuse if we're seen meeting together secretly.」

「… No more, there's no reason to listen to you… My Kaori is already…」

The moonlight cast many shadows in the trees. Hiyama spoke in disgust toward the other person who hid in the shadows, bringing his fist to a nearby tree.

Hiyama had cooperated with this person's plan because he heard Kaori could be made his own. He already had no reason to cooperate. Even if his attempted murder was exposed, it was not like the victim himself would do anything at this point. However,

the person laughed and tempted him like the devil once again.

「You only have to steal her back, don't you? Fortunately, we have some good bait.」

「… Bait?」

He did not understand. Hiyama looked suspiciously as the person nodded.

「Yes, bait. For example, even if she gave priority to her feelings and left her companions… surely she still has friends here, a childhood friend… could she leave this person? Especially if she knew of her predicament.」

「You…」

「It's easy to call her here. No need to be so pessimistic. Things were really unlucky this time… but the results themselves are still a little convenient. Yes, that's right. Shall we continue when we reach the Capital? If so… perhaps your wish can be fulfilled?」

「…」

Hiyama stared at his accomplice who lurked in the shadow. Though receiving his gaze, the person simply smiled.

Hiyama, though he did not know the entirety of the plan, could guess that it was a plan that would injure his classmates. For his own purposes, he would easily betray the companions he shared both joys and sorrows with. He felt a pain at how wrong this was. A chill ran down his back again.

(A disgusting person as usual… but I can't go back any longer… I… to get Kaori back, can only do this… That's it. No need to hesitate. My purpose is Kaori. I'm not in the wrong.)

Hiyama did not notice his thoughts had already been confused. As an accomplice, he looked away from his crimes, justifying his actions. Everything was for Kaori.

The person in the shadows understood Hiyama's feelings as he fell

silent and simply awaited an answer.

「… I get it. I'll cooperate again. But… 」

「Yes, I know. I will get what I want, you get what you want. Give and take, right? Things will be more critical from now on. Can I ask you to continue on, even in the Capital? 」

Hiyama's expression distorted. The person turned around and disappeared, merging into the trees.

Only the boy with eyes filled with filth remained.

Elsewhere, while the meeting between two suspicious people was being held, a boy and a girl were standing beneath the moonlight.

It was different from the secret gathering; they were on a bridge which drew a small arc.

It was a waterway in a back alley in the town, behind some of the shops. Many such waterways were necessary to accommodate the restaurants built all over. The moon, entering its final phase, reflected off the flowing water. The face of a boy could also be seen looking down at the reflected moonlight.

To be accurate, he was "hanging his head." Furthermore, his face was dark, far from its usual brightness.

He was like a small businessman whose company went bankrupt, and he was now forced to carry a large debt. The boy was the Hero, Amanogawa Kouki.

「… Nothing to say? 」

Kouki did not look away from the moon in the water as he called to the other person. It was his childhood friend of 10 years, Yaegashi Shizuku.

Shizuku, unlike Kouki, entrusted her back to the rail of the bridge as she looked at the moon in the heavens. Her trademark ponytail

shook in the wind.

She looked at her childhood friend. Not having her gaze matched, she returned to watching the moon.

「You want me to say something?」

「…」

No answer. No, Kouki could not answer. Even if he looked at the moon reflected on the water surface, when he thought of Kaori, he could only recall what happened. He was anxious. Her expression was no lie, it simply held unadulterated joy. Kouki was convinced she was sick.

Though Kouki had known Kaori for 10 years, he had seen Kaori with beautiful expressions, forced expressions, pained expressions. He had never seen this expression before, however. It was like a bolt from the blue.

Every time he recalled her expression, unspeakable feelings sprung from deep in Kouki's mind. They were dark, heavy, muddy feelings.

They were unconditional and irrational; however, he felt it natural. His childhood friend, Kaori, had always been by his side. He did not want this to change, even in the future. To put it bluntly, he wanted Kaori to remain his. He was envious.

This envy, perhaps it came from love or perhaps it came from a simple desire to monopolize. Though Kouki did not understand this, all he could think of was that something he desired "Wwas taken."

However, the existence who "took" her was Hajime (though the person in question would definitely deny it.) Kaori decided to go with him. Furthermore, the existence known as Hajime treated their duel like nothing, and it was clearly impossible to challenge him again. He was miserable, resentful of Hajime, and doubting of Kaori's feelings. Various desires were mixed inside him, like a garbage can of things he had thrown aside now taking root inside his mind.

That was why, toward the girl who was his other childhood friend

who appeared before him as he looked at the water… he required no answer. Naturally, one was not needed. Unable to find words to say, Kouki remained silent.

Shizuku, seeing Kouki like this, knit her eyebrows. 「Can't be helped.」 She began talking as she looked from the side.

「… I think you're in the wrong this time, Kouki.」 「… Wrong?」

Unexpected words returned from Shizuku, so Kouki simply parroted her words. Shizuku was now looking at Kouki, continuing to speak while doing so.

「That's right. Kaori, from the beginning, never belonged to you, right?」

「… That's… then, are you saying she's Nagumo's?」

She guessed Kouki's intent from his gaze which was clearly shaken. He was desperate, he was looking for an object to vent on. Shizuku simply flicked his forehead strongly in response. 「Ow!?」 Kouki instinctively suppressed his pain as Shizuku scolded him with a cold voice.

「You idiot. Kaori belongs to Kaori alone. No matter what you choose, Kaori goes where she wants to. Honestly, who did she want to be with…? That's obvious.」

「… How long? When did you know, Shizuku?」 He did not ask a "what" question. Shizuku nodded.

「Since middle school… Kaori met Nagumo-kun … Well, he had forgotten her… though it was more like they never properly met rather than him not remembering.」

「… What's with that? What do you mean?」

「You'll hear it from Kaori herself. It's not my place to say. 」
「Then the reason Kaori talked to Nagumo in the class so much was… um… because… she liked him?」

「Yes, that's right.」 「… 」

Kouki looked reproachfully at Shizuku who frankly said something he did not want to hear. Kouki was returned with a similar gaze.

Perhaps angry at her attitude, Kouki simply said everything on his mind like a child throwing a tantrum.

「… Why is it Nagumo? When we were in Japan, he was just an otaku, he had no motivation, and he didn't do anything special, either… He just smiled and laughed like an idiot…

When Kaori talked to him, he never had a good attitude… he's an otaku, too… if it's me, I'd always treat Kaori well. I'd always value her, and do my best for her… That Nagumo, he has so many girls

attending him, isn't he the lowest? And he murdered that woman! He killed her without hesitation even though she wasn't resisting. What is this! That's right, this is weird, he must have done something. I'm sure he— Guha!? 」

He grew more heated as he spoke. Kouki, who began to interpret things to his own convenience, started abusing Hajime. Again, Shizuku flicked his forehead (Motionless version.) What are you doing! Kouki glared at her. Shizuku could only look at him in amazement.

「 You've fallen into your bad habit again. You're interpreting things to your own convenience again, just like you have been doing until now. 」

「 Interpreting to my convenience… what is that. 」

「 It's true, isn't it? Kouki, what do you know about Nagumo-kun? Whether it was back in Japan or here, you know nothing about him… Those girls all looked happy, no, perhaps you saw that as well. Yet you simply said things selfishly and ignored that fact…

Though you might think Nagumo-kun is a terrible person who doesn't suit Kaori, isn't that just you interpreting things in a way that suits you? 」

「 B, but… he murdered someone! 」

「 … At that time, I was trying to kill her. I couldn't do it because I wasn't strong enough. From now on… the same thing will happen. I will surely put the intent to murder into my sword. To survive. For the people important to me. Whether I can do it or not, I won't

know until the time comes… but for now, it will remain an attempted murder… if I kill someone, will you also hate me? 」

Kouki had no words to say to Shizuku's confession.

His childhood friend, Shizuku, had a sense of responsibility and desire to help those in trouble more than most people. When he heard she had the intent to murder in that fight, he suddenly felt her a distant existence. However, despite her wry smile, he could see anxiety and fear in her gaze; Kouki shook his head.

Seeing this, Shizuku continued to talk as if alone.

「 Certainly, I was surprised by his change… considering his character when he was in Japan, I could say he's a completely different person… Even so, Kaori must have felt something of

the "Nagumo Hajime" we knew, so not everything may have changed… It's possible he could have chosen not to fight to help us, even so, he chose to kill instead of us. 」

「 … So you're saying he was right? 」

「 Right… probably not. Murder is murder… There's no justification. 」

「 Then… 」

「 Still, we don't have the qualifications to blame Nagumo-kun. Because we were weak, we entrusted everything to him… 」

In short, if there were any complaints, it could only be directed to themselves. The reason they could not get their desired result was because they simply lacked the ability. They left everything to someone else. Complaining to him was simply a fruitless endeavor.

Kouki understood what she did not say explicitly and sank into silence. While Hajime was easily ending the lives of the demons, he was on the floor, unable to do anything; he was sullen, unable to object. Even so, his expression clearly showed his dissatisfaction,
「But murder is definitely wrong!」

With Kouki being unexpectedly obstinate, Shizuku began admonishing him again.

「Kouki, I don't hate that strong, straight-forward sense of justice you have.」

「… Shizuku.」

「But you're slow. It's about time you doubt yourself.」 「Doubt myself?」

「Yes. Certainly, a strong desire is necessary to get things done; however, if there is ever any deviation to the path, you simply blindly run forward without doubting yourself. This time, you need to think about whether your desires are correct, where you went wrong. Maybe I should say you're "still" wrong… just keep thinking… Honestly, living correctly is difficult. When we came to this world, we were pitted against these monsters…

I've always thought I was killing them.」

Kouki was surprised to know Shizuku had felt this way from the very start.

「Kouki. You're not always right, and, even if you are, it can still be a lethal weapon used against you. Well, this convenient interpretation this time isn't due to your "correctness" but your jealousy.」

「N, no, I'm not jealous…」

「Won't you stop making excuses to yourself?」「…」

He looked down again at the moon reflected on the surface of the water. However, his dark atmosphere had lessened, as he thought about something deeply.

At the very least, he was not recklessly rushing forward into a negative spiral. Shizuku felt relieved and sighed.

With this being the time to leave him to himself, she stood upright from the railing and quietly began leaving. Kouki's voice called out to her from behind, causing her to stop.

「Shizuku… you're not going anywhere, are you?」「… What's this, so suddenly?」

「… Don't go, Shizuku.」「… 」

Kouki was begging her, in a way. Most girls would have gone kyaa

kyaa and fallen in love with Kouki back in Japan. Unfortunately, Shizuku was simply “amazed.”

Though she was confused with Kaori now gone… she looked over her shoulder to see Kouki staring at the moon reflected in the water.

「I may not be the “moon”… but I’ll refuse a clingy man.」 With that message, Shizuku left. Kouki looked at the alley where

Shizuku disappeared and then gazed at the moon in the water again. He noticed the meaning of the words she said earlier.

「… Moon in the water… is it?」

The moon mirrored in the water. It was like a flower on the water’s surface. It was not something that could be taken just by grasping at it despite it being visible on the water surface.

Unconsciously, he was looking at it like he would Kaori. Her expression at the time when she left with Hajime was not something he could simply obtain.

Shizuku had said she was not the “moon.” She was something obtainable, but her words were still sharp. Kouki smiled wryly, thinking about what he said to his childhood friend.

Kouki stopped looking at the phantom moon and looked up at the sky. He did not doubt “it.” He would reach it eventually, even if it felt far. Kouki, while sighing heavily, began to think about the words of his gentle childhood friend.

Whether to change or not… that was where Kouki remained.

A little time after.

3 weeks had passed since the time Kouki had received the impact of reunion, separation, and a night of complicated feelings in 【Post Town Horuad.】

Currently, the group had returned to the Capital. The reason being was only one. It was their fatal fault of not being able to “kill a person.” The purpose was to let them overcome this point. If they participated in a war against Dvils, “murder” was a necessary experience. If they could not surpass this, it would be pointless for them to participate.

Though not much time had passed, the events at 【the Town of Ul】had reached their ears as well, and because they themselves were attacked, it was clear the Devils were moving. In a word, war was near. Therefore, the class needed to get over this problem as quickly as possible.

Because of that, they were fighting against the knights led by Commander Meld. Ryuutarou and Kondo, Nagayama and the others as well, they all had some resolution, but the moment they saw Hajime shoot through the female devil’s head, their resolution swung. Can I really do that? They had repeatedly asked themselves this question.

They did not have time, nor could they force these children to

commit murder lest they mentally break, so the knights were racking their brains.

To them who were spending their days moping, some good news appeared.

Aiko had returned. The class was typically drawn in by Kouki's charisma, but everyone, including the Hero himself, was lacking in energy. Though they broke through the poor mood that nestled in their hearts from their defeat and Nagayama was helping the mood maker, Suzu, cheer everyone up, they were still stuck on the problem of their defeat, so they were thankful for the existence of a familiar and reliable adult. They wanted to see their diligent teacher who was always worried about them.

Shizuku was the first to react when she heard Aiko returned. She ended her training early, wanting to talk to Aiko about a variety of things. She wanted, if possible, to meet with Aiko before her classmates so she could exchange information objectively, without prejudice.

She placed the black sword she received from Hajime in its sheath and placed it on her belt then dashed through the passages of the Royal Palace. Seeing her like this, the maids and some of the higher-born women blushed. It was a painful problem for Shizuku, which made her hold her head in her hands, that they thought of her as a man. At the very least, she wanted the women older than her to stop calling her 「Onee-sama.」

Shizuku, because she heard of the things Hajime did in the town of

Ul, wanted to ask Aiko's thoughts on him directly. Depending on Aiko's impressions, Kouki's mind may lean further toward an undesirable direction. It was in her nature to take up such difficulties.

「I'm sure he did something unreasonable in Ul… and he readily gave me this sword… What's with this "It's so hard it can cut anything." This is an artifact that can be considered a national treasure.」

While talking to herself, Shizuku stroked the sword at her waist.

While heading to Aiko's room, she recalled how the national blacksmiths reacted when she went to talk to them about maintenance.

This sword, though Shizuku simply called it a black sword, was a one-of-a-kind, even amongst all the blacksmiths in the country.

While Shizuku was one of "God's Apostles" and though the men themselves stood on ceremony, the moment she showed them the black sword and asked them to appraise it, their attitude changed drastically. They grabbed Shizuku's shoulders, where did you get this, who made it, they seemed angry, as if everything was an illusion; it was an unpleasant interrogation.

Shizuku looked at them in bewilderment as they asked more calmly. The reason she was questioned so fervently was because, even in the treasure room in the Royal Palace, a sword like this was on a level of the Holy Sword itself. In terms of magic output and

capacity, it did not quite reach that level, but in terms of precision engineering and functionality, it was at the same level.

To study the weapon in detail, she poured magic into the tip of the sword, creating two blades of wind. Furthermore, she understood that she could release them further.

Furthermore, the sheath could also accommodate magic, shooting powerful needles imbued with thunder (from the sheathe,) something of an anti-theft system.

The blade itself hardly needed maintenance, since it was made of Azanthium Ore. If anything, the needles would need replacement as they were consumable.

However, there was a problem; there was no magic formation for which magic could be poured into it. This was natural. Hajime could manipulate magic directly, he had no intent to hand this over to another person originally. Still, he was not wrong in saying “It’s so hard it will cut well.”

Of course, this function… which could only be utilized with direct magic manipulation, was seen as mysterious, and for this mysterious black sword which could not be activated (from the

blacksmiths’ point of view,) the blacksmiths burnt with their own fighting spirit.

Though they could not make a weapon with such precision, they could still modify it. In short, they had magic poured into it in any

way they could. After 3 days and nights without sleep, they managed to install a formation on it.

With this, Shizuku could chant an aria to draw out the full potential of the black sword. Afterward, almost all the blacksmiths were in bed for several days, their magic drained completely, but they were all happy.

Remembering the amazing spirit of the craftsmen, Shizuku arrived at Aiko's door. Though she knocked, there was no reaction. Since she heard Aiko went to report to the king, she most likely had yet to return; Shizuku leaned against the wall, deciding to wait for her.

It was about 30 minutes until Aiko returned, looking completely depressed; she was walking without looking forward, it was serious.

Shizuku, noticing her, called out suspiciously. 「Sensei… Sensei!」

「Hoe!?」

Aiko shook as she let out a strange noise and looked about. She finally noticed Shizuku. She sighed in relief, happy to see her healthy.

「Yaegashi-san! It's been a while. How are you doing? Are you injured? Is everyone safe?」

Her expression just before was due to her worry for the students. Seeing Ai-chan Sensei as always, Shizuku felt a sense of security.

For a while, the two enjoyed their reunion before going into Aiko's room to exchange information.

「I see… so Shimizu-kun… 」

Shizuku and Aiko exchanged information alone in the room. Those

were the first words Shizuku muttered after hearing about what happened in Ul.

There was an unbearable tension in the room. Aiko's shoulders dropped dejectedly; she was obviously worried by what happened to Shimizu. Thinking about Aiko's sense of values, she would worry no matter what the circumstances, so Shizuku could think of nothing to say.

However, she was still happy, pleased by Aiko's safety.

「It's unfortunate what happened to Shimizu-kun… But you're still alive. Really, we need to be grateful for Nagumo-kun. 」

Aiko smiled in return, seeing her student care for her.

「That's right. When we first met, he had the air of someone who did not care at all about the world… but since then, he helped you all. And he's even taking care of a small child … Fu fu, maybe he's regaining a little bit of his old self. Or maybe he's grown up, even with his change… He really is reliable. 」

Aiko's eyes looked to the distance, and her cheeks… why were they slightly red? Shizuku was suspicious about the atmosphere and gazed at Aiko who smiled reminiscently.

Aiko, noticing her glance, coughed. She cleared her throat and sat up; however, because she could not get rid of the feeling that she was trying to smooth things over, her cheeks were cramped, and she had an unpleasant feeling. Shizuku decided to press further.

「… Sensei? You said he helped you out of something dangerous a

while ago, but how did he do that exactly?」「Eh!?」

「No, you said you were almost dead, so I'm a bit worried about how he treated you…」

「A, about that…」

Shizuku recalled Commander Meld in his near-death state and recalled the existence of the medicine. Even so, Aiko's cheeks were red a moment ago, and her eyes were swimming about…

suspicious indeed. Shizuku, as befitting a swordsman, cut to the root of things.

「… Sensei. Did something… happen?」

「!? Nothing? Wh, what do you mean? He and I are teacher and student!」

「Sensei. Calm down. Your tone is weird.」

「!」

Aiko shook intensely and desperately said “I’m a teacher, I’m a teacher…” under her breath. Though she was likely talking to herself in her mind, her thoughts leaked out.

Shizuku was convinced. Though she was not sure to what level, Aiko was beginning to hold feelings for Hajime different from other students.

(Hajime -kun! You! What the hell did you do to Ai- chan!) Shizuku could already see what was going on and yelled in her

mind.

Apparently Hajime had a means of constructing flags beyond what Kouki could do. He was still different from Kouki in that he was not completely daft, and, though she might hear things more clearly if she asked further… she felt Aiko was a little too delicate at this time.

A rival for her best friend lurked about in an unexpected place; Shizuku looked to the sky hiding the cramps in her cheek with her hands. Somehow, she felt Hajime was dangerous to the point that she began feeling some animosity; she was seriously considering spreading a new nickname for him, but… she managed to abandon that thought.

After the two calmed themselves down, they continued to talk.
「So, Sensei, you came to report to His Majesty? This seems quite

serious.」

Hearing Shizuku’s question, Aiko had an expression filled with bitterness.

「… Formally, Nagumo-kun has been recognized as a heretic.」「!? What's with that…!? No, I suppose it was to be expected…

but isn't that too thoughtless of them?」

Hajime was powerful. With just a few people, he could destroy a crowd of sixty thousand demons using unknown artifacts.

Hajime's companions also possessed a level of power which was normally impossible. However, they were not cooperative with the Saint Church, and they did not show any aversion to opposing it. Both the Kingdom and the Saint Church agreed he was dangerous.

Even so, to recognize him as a heretic seemed to be going too far. With this status, Hajime could be subjugated by anyone at any

time for going against the teachings of God and being an enemy to the Saint Church. In some cases, the Temple Knights and the Kingdom's army could be moved.

If they attacked Hajime because of this, he would antagonize them with his immense thirst for blood. The top tier of the government should understand the danger of this. However, they gave their verdict immediately upon hearing Aiko's report. Shizuku was obviously surprised.

Aiko nodded in admiration of Shizuku's quick thinking.

「I agree with you. Though he has so much power, he is not following the Saint Church; even so, he saved Ul; no matter how

much I protested, it was not something I could win. This situation is something Nagumo-kun expected, so he promoted the “Goddess of Fertility” in Ul.」

Aiko paused and shook her head as if in pain.

「Already, the “Sword of the Goddess” and the “Goddess of Fertility” seem to have spread far. Though he is recognized as a heretic, this is the same as denying the “Goddess of Fertility” who saved the people. They can’t ignore my protests so easily, but they forced the decision still. This is obviously strange… 」

「… I’m worried. What are they thinking… Rather, “who” will they send that is as strong as Nagumo-kun? Is there even any point to this?」

「! I see… Maybe…」

「Yes, it will be us… Sorry, but this is pretty unwelcome, isn’t it? I don’t want to die yet. And fighting against Nagumo-kun… I don’t even want to think about it.」

Shizuku trembled. Aiko smiled bitterly, understanding her feelings.

Aiko decided to talk about the story she heard from Hajime about the god of this world going mad to Kouki and the others before they were coaxed into hunting Hajime by the church. She had no evidence, so she was not sure if they would believe her. Either way, they were doing their best in the fight against the Devils, believing that God would return them to their world if they worked hard.

In fact, the god seemed to be a hedonist, so it was extremely likely they would not be able to return home, so they would have to find a way home on their own. No one would believe her if she said that so suddenly.

Would Kouki feel it nonsense after hearing the story and still fight? Or would he believe it and adopt a new policy…? Though Aiko did not know what would happen, she needed to stop them from believing the Saint Church so readily.

「Yaegashi- san. Nagumo-kun talked to me about something, not only did he feel I would not believe him, he expected Amanogawa-kun to antagonize him.」

「Talk…?」

「Yes. The god the church worships, and one of the reason Nagumo-kun is traveling. Though there is no evidence that this is true… it's very important. Tonight, I want to say something to everyone…」

「That's… No, I understand. Shall I call everyone now?」

「No, I don't want the Saint Church to hear this, so let's talk when we naturally gather at dinner. It will be a long-awaited reunion, so we should be able to speak without intruders.」

「I see… I understand. Then, at supper.」 Afterward, Shizuku and Aiko chatted.

They had no reasons of thinking everyone would not gather at dinner…

Evening.

The vivid orange of the sun was disappearing, and Aiko was

walking down a hallway alone. The evening sun shined through the windows, drawing out a splendid contrast of colors with the wall.

As Aiko headed to dinner, she stopped walking to view the beauty of the sunset. She noticed a small feminine figure in the shadows. Her posture was graceful, and she wore the nun's habit of the Saint Church.

This woman was beautiful; however, her voice was mechanically cold.

「It is a pleasure to meet you, Hatayama Aiko. I have come for you.」

Though Aiko felt a chill down her back, she calmed herself down, not wanting to be impolite to a person she only just met.

「Um, nice to meet you. So you came… to bring me to dinner?」

「No, you will be heading to the temple.」「Eh? 」

Aiko unintentionally let out a sound to the words which refused any counter. The woman advanced from the shadow. Seeing the woman's beauty, Aiko took a deep breath instinctively.

Reflecting the evening sun were her star-like eyes and silver hair. She had large, long, narrow blue eyes, and mysterious features which made it difficult to determine if she was a girl or a woman. She was tall for a woman, approximately 170 centimeters in height, so Aiko had to look up. Her fair skin was smooth and as pale as porcelain. Her chest was not too large, but not too small; taking balance into account, she was just right.

However, rather than calling her expressionless, it was more like she had perfected the expression of a Noh mask. No one would doubt it if she were called an exquisite piece of art crafted by a master sculptor. Her appearance was beyond humanity.

This woman, without smiling, continued to speak.

「What you are trying to do is inconvenient. The direction your students are going in is "interesting," so we will have you

temporarily leave until the time is right.」「Wh, what are you…」

Aiko retreated from the woman who approached soundlessly. At that time, the woman's eyes shined blue. Aiko felt a haze in her head, getting stronger as she tried to concentrate.

「… I see. As expected of one of "God's" chosen. If my "enchantment" does not work, you leave me no other choice but physical means.」

「D, don’t get near me! Get away… Uu!?」

Aiko tried to use magic against this woman who used a form of magic she could not discern; but the woman closed their distance and hammered her fist into Aiko’s stomach by the time Aiko finished chanting.

Aiko crumbled, overwhelmed by darkness as the woman’s words fell upon her.

「Don’t worry. I won’t kill you. You are an excellent piece. You will be useful for eliminating the Irregular.」

In Aiko’s mind, the boy with white hair and an eye patch floated. Even knowing it would not reach him, she called out his name in her mind before she fell unconscious.

— Nagumo-kun!

「?」

The woman shouldered Aiko so as not to feel her weight as she walked down the hall when she felt signs of someone. For a while, she quietly observed the area before opening the door to the guest room.

She slowly approached the closet in the empty room and suddenly opened it completely.

However, there was no one inside. She tilted her neck and looked at the surroundings. Before long, she picked Aiko back up and left, thinking she made a mistake.

In the silent room, a voice trembled. 「… If I don't tell them… someone…」

There was no one in the room. However, the footsteps sounded

as they went into the distance.

After a few seconds, the room was once again silent.

Extra Chapter

When I first saw him, there were angry voices and a crowd of curious spectators.

After school that day, I aimed for a large-scale super market in the neighboring town; I was walking alone through the town.

I took out my cell phone from my pocket and looked at my mail. Considering the dish she was making and the types of goods she needed, only this kind of place satisfied Mom's demands.

Anyway, we have meals that even professionals would lose to lining our table at the Shirasaki house every day. While I'm glad, having to look for ingredients and seasonings after school is a bit… well, it's fine since everything feels happy when exploring different dishes?

When Mom asks "please," I don't even think about refusing. Mom's usually calm, graceful, and kind, an ideal for me… but when she's angry, she's really scary. It feels like there's some unknown existence whose true character cannot be determined behind her, it's hard to explain in words. Dad says 「The Shirasaki Devil, the Shirasaki Devil is! Really, I'm sorry! I got ahead of myself!」 And then he bows down, but… what's the Shirasaki Devil?

While I was walking along without thinking deeply, the supermarket came into view. At that time, I heard something bad reach my ear.

「Listen here granny. This thing, it's vintage. It's rare. This isn't a problem you can simply apologize for! Got it? You got it～?」

「Really, I'm sorry. I'll pay for the cleaning…」

「Like～ I～ said～ cleaning isn't going to be enough!」

Hearing this angry voice, I turn my gaze in annoyance. There's a small boy crying in fright, and standing before him is an old woman bowing repeatedly.

She's bowing to a university student, he has the atmosphere of someone you don't want to approach. Sorry for saying this, but he just looks like a delinquent.

When I look closer, that child seems to have dropped takoyaki on the delinquent's "seriously rare"jeans, covering it with sauce.

… I see. So the situation is exactly as it looks.

「What do I do… the atmosphere isn't good, but I should go help.」

I can't tell if those flashy jeans are expensive or not like the delinquent says. But to be so rare that a cleaning service can't handle it, and trying to demand payment in a place with lots of pedestrians… It's a bit strange. At least, the boy is frightened, threatening this apologizing grandma is wrong.

But, but…

(… It's scary.)

I can't even move a step forward. The more I think 「I need to help,」 the harder it is to move. He has a sharp look, bright hair, and he looks like he's used to threatening others, clearly someone used to violence, it's scary… my legs are shaking.

「S, someone…」

In a small voice which can't even seem to form words, I ask for help from the surroundings. I look around, 「Someone, please help,」 though I understand how miserable this is, leaving it to others.

But the moment the woman looks at them, they all look away. … I can't call them cold. Because I'm no different.

「R, right. I'll call Shizuku-chan… and Kouki-kun and Ryuutarou-kun.」

I remember my childhood friends who can fight well for some reason and pull out my phone to call in a panic. As soon as my finger presses the button, the situation changes.

「Ah, whatever, just give me what you have in your purse for now. If you don't have enough, you can always go to the bank, right? Go ahead, I'll just keep your purse here for you.」

「Th, that's…」

「Huh!? Shouldn't you be taking responsibility with what your brat does? Got any complaints!?」

Apparently the man is trying to take her to the bank to get her to withdraw money. I'm getting more anxious. I forgot to call.

「Shizuku-chan, they won't reach in time… I, I need to do something.」

My head is swirling round and round, I really am good for nothing. Uu, scary. Scary, but… fine, I just need to use a woman's courage! I'm sure someone said that sometime! I'll just charge ahead!

I was going to go ahead with my bad habit which Shizuku-chan always scolds me and Kouki-kun for. At that time,

「Um～ Excuse me, would you forgive them with my wallet?」
Before I knew it, a boy appeared beside them. He must be about

my age. His uniform is different, so he probably is a student from the area.

As I was about to move forward, my feet stopped and I stared. A normal boy. He doesn't dazzle like Kouki-kun, and he's not big

like Ryuutarou-kun. His eyebrows are raised in embarrassment, he's smiling wryly, honestly, he feels like a boy you can find anywhere. Still, my eyes are drawn to him like a magnet.

「Huh!? Who're you, someone unrelated getting involved! I'll beat you!」

「Ah, no, well, it's true I'm unrelated, but… but, you know. Letting it go with a cleaning fee, I just thought that'd be best for everyone～…」

Though a bit coherent, the boy casually stands between the delinquent and the grandma and child, bowing with an embarrassed face, seemingly more and more confused.

In a certain sense, he has an evasive attitude that can't read the atmosphere which only serves to irritate the delinquent.

「Then you pay in her place. 1 million.」 He began saying that, but the boy said,

「Impossible.」

「Tehe,」somehow, it feels like I can hear that as the boy answers

in a straight manner while ducking his head… It's a bit cute I think.

The delinquent grabs the boy's jacket in irritation. The boy seems to be sweating and saying things desperately.

But the delinquent frowns and pushes the boy away as his eyes look more dangerous than before. I know those eyes, Kouki-kun has gotten involved in fights when those eyes appear. I know from experience.

That's why I tried to shout out to the boy, but…

「Gu.」

The boy groans quietly. His stomach was kicked. Like I thought, he resorted to violence.

「It's fine already,」the grandma says, worried about the boy. She's tugging at his clothes, tears in her eyes.

As I thought, the moment violence appears, the surroundings get noisy. People are pulling out their phones to contact someone… maybe the police.

(Right, the police! I should have called them from the start! I'm an idiot!)

Kouki-kun and them, they always take the lead and jump into fights, going on a rampage and taking care of things. I forgot completely since I'm always relying on them. My head really is useless.

While I'm tearing out my hair mentally, the boy crouched on the ground looks up. I'm surprised by his earnest expression, and for some reason, my mind goes blank. It feels like my temperature went up for some reason too. There are still a few months until Spring. While I'm like this, the situation advances.

The boy endures his pain as he sweats and opens his mouth.

「Please, let this go with the cleaning fees. If not, should I go with my plan?」

Hearing these provocative words, my eyes go wide. Could it be, this boy, even if he doesn't look like it, is he used to cfighting?

Maybe the delinquent is thinking the same thing, he glares at the boy.

「Ha, looking for a fight? Fine, let's go—」

The man in jeans calls out angrily and brings up his fists while staring at the boy. The moment he was about to say 「Let's go at it,」

「Truly! I truly am sorry～～～!!!」

He interrupts the delinquent and apologizes as loud as he can.

— His bowing is really artistic. 「Wha,」

The delinquent, with his fists up, doesn't seem to know what to do… it's quite a good bow… one step, two steps back.

The surrounding people also stop moving and stare at the boy. In daily life, it's not normal to see a person prostrate, rather, I'm not surprised everyone's reacting like this.

The boy shouts while bowing without minding the surrounding people.

「Truly! Truly! I apologize! This small child burned his mouth on the takoyaki his grandmother bought him, leading to him spilling sauce on your pants! This behavior can never be forgiven! This is an evil that even God can't forgive!!」

「Eh, ah, no, r, right.」

The delinquent is confused!? I see, right, if a small child spilling sauce on his pants is seen as "an evil even God can't forgive," with this being shouted out so loudly… yeah, embarrassing. And the boy's prostrate too. Maybe he's ambitious or something, because the boy isn't stopping.

「Honestly! For someone like you, let alone 1 million, even 5, no, 10 million is barely enough to show sincerity!」

「1, 10 million!? No, wait a minute, it doesn't need to be that much —」

The delinquent is panicking. Ah, the grandma is stunned too. The surrounding people too are saying, 「Is he serious?」

… What is this. It got really chaotic really fast.

「Buuuut! Buuut! It's impossible for her! She's constantly chased to repay the debt her husband left, and she can only see her grandchild once a year, every day she lives on her pension.

Even today's takoyaki, how much did she have to cut her food budget by…」

Eh!? She has those kind of circumstances!? I look at her immediately in surprise. The others, the delinquent too, also look at her in astonishment.

Only the lady is flustered and denying his words, 「M, my husband is alive, and we don't have any debt…」

She tries to argue, but she's interrupted.

「So please! Please! Somehow, can you have the kindness in your heart to forgive her! Please? Please, show your benevolence!!」

The boy's shouts spread out.

… What is this. What's with this situation? I think everyone here is thinking that.

But in a sense, it is effective.

The delinquent is blushing… right, I understand. How should I put it? Being prostrated to in a place with lots of people, and then there's the content of the apology. It would feel like being a bad magistrate in a period play.

「Y, you. You're weird! You suddenly came out and then act like you know everything about this old bag—」

The delinquent's words are natural. But before he can continue,
「I'm so sorrrrryyyyy!!」

He apologizes again. With heartfelt sincerity, screaming as loudly as he can. While prostrating.

「Sh, shut your mouth! We're movi—」

「Please, forgive us of 10 million! We'll die!」 「Hol, wait! Nobody said 10 milli—」

「Please, forgive us! Show your kindness!!」 「Shut it! Be quie—」

「Your forgivenessssssssss!」

The delinquent tries to stop the boy from prostrating and shouting by trampling on him and pulling his hair to force him to stand or spitting on him, but the boy sticks to the ground, continuing to bow, repeating his apology. The delinquent is

getting anxious.

Even the surrounding people are embarrassed. The old lady is trembling, trying to hold in her laughter. It seems both parties concerned are on the edge.

And he was right on target.

「Shit, acting like this here! I'm going back!」

The person in jeans ran away. 「H, Hide-chan!? Wait!」two people ran after him in a hurry.

This place has a delicate atmosphere no one can describe. Somehow, no one can seem to move or even think; the boy kneeling prostrate slowly stands up. While everyone is focused on him, he picks up the dropped purse and hands it to the woman, 「Here.」

「Ah, thank you,」she says with a cramp in her cheek. Still, she smiles when she thanks him.

「No, I'm sorry,」the boy apologizes for some reason. 「I can't be here any longer! I'm going home! Good bye!」he says, then he disappears with enough power that I think I can hear the wind go Pyuu. 「Ah,」the old lady says, but the boy is already gone.

「… How should I say this, he's an amazing person.」

As the surrounding people leave, I'm standing alone, watching as the boy ran away. I grasp my chest, feeling it tighten.

「Right, right, Shizuku-chan. That person, he immediately disappeared… eh, Shizuku- chan, are you listening? You haven't been responding much for a while…」

『… I heard. About 10 times on this "amazing prostration."』

「No, Shizuku-chan. It's about the "amazing boy who prostrated." I, I'm not someone so amazing that I can do that.」

『Ah, you're right. Sorry. But you know, Kaori. You can tell this to me at school tomorrow. Making me hear the same story ten times in the middle of the night, I wish you'd be a bit more thoughtful.』

「Eh… no way. It's already this late!? I'm sorry, Shizuku-chan.」
My voice goes up as I hear my best friend, Yaegashi Shizuku, talk in a sleepy voice. The thing earlier today, these light feelings, I

wanted to tell someone. I called Shizuku-chan at 10 PM. It's been 4 hours that I've been talking to her.

To make her stay with me until this late, I really am sorry.

『Mm? It's fine. But please, don't go repeating this again … It was a big deal for you, right Kaori? Fu fu, to think I'd hear about the day

Kaori became anxious about a boy… You've naturally cut down countless boys who have confessed to you, but it looks like your Spring finally came.』

What does Shizuku-chan mean? She seems really happy, but… I can tell she's grinning on the other side of the phone.

「Shizuku-chan? What do you mean? I don't do fencing like you, so what do you mean cut? And isn't it still winter?」

『… Kaori. Thanks for that natural remark. And I may learn fencing, but I don't cut people! You natural bomb-remark girl!』

Shizuku-chan is angry… But what is she trying to say?

『Haa. You really aren't aware. No, that's fine. Well, as far as I've known you, this is a first… I guess it's still at the level of "I'm interested"… I guess you need to figure this out on your own. But you really are ignorant of these things, will you notice? It's "Kaori," right? As her best friend, should I be giving help? But….』

On the other side of the phone, Shizuku-chan is saying some fragmented things. It feels like she's being impolite.

「Eh, um, Shizuku-chan?」 『Ha!? Ah, um, what is it?』

Shizuku-chan returned to talking to me. I decided to bring up another reason I called her. Uu, it's embarrassing for some reason, my face is hot. I wonder why.

「Ah, um. Actually, I want you to go out with me for a bit… 」
『Oh, did something happen? You're unexpectedly hesitant. 』 She's pushing my back with those words, so I'll ask.

「Thank you, Shizuku-chan. Um, this time, I want you to go with me to that boy's school. 」

『*What*? 』

Shizuku-chan became a foreigner for some reason.

「Like I said, I want you to go with me to his school. Um… and talk to him… maybe, maybe become friends～ 」

No good. My face is hot. I don't know why, but my face is hot. My feet are pittering about, and I'm rolling myself up in my blanket too. Shizuku-chan is talking to me with a strain in her voice.

『Hold it a minute, okay～? Kaori, didn't you just meet him today? 』

「Yeah? I couldn't talk to him. 」

『… So why do you know his school? 』

「It's not hard to tell. There's only one junior high school you can

walk from in range there, and I saw his uniform, it was easy. 」
『… 』

Shizuku-chan is usually sharp with her answers. She's not responding though. She must be sleepy.

「Hello, Shizuku-chan? I'm sorry, you really must be tired.」『Ah, no, I'm sorry. I think I just caught a bit of a glimpse of my

best friend's scary side…』 I can hear her clear her throat.

『Well, that's fine. I'll go with you. I guess I'm used to Kaori's charge mode. But you don't know his name, right?』

「Um, I thought I could ambush him a bit… and watch as he comes to the front gate maybe. And I can wait where I saw him today or something like that.」

『… This somewhat smells of stalker power… Well, if you don't know his name, I guess this is all you can do.』

Stalker power, that's mean, Shizuku-chan. But thinking about it carefully, it hurts to say, but I can't object. I try to cheat her a bit by talking faster.

「R, right. Like this, I can get his photo quietly… I definitely won't miss it this time.」

『Stop right there.』

Why is she stopping me with such a strong tone? 『Not good, this friend of mine is naturally terrible.』 I hear her say. Shizuku-

chan's character seems like it's collapsing a bit… Shizuku-chan, are you tired? Are you okay? We should probably stop talking soon.

「Anyway, after school tomorrow, we'll charge to his school immediately. We'll definitely find him, m, make friends. We'll talk about a lot of things, and on holidays, we can spend our time together, I can go to his house… E he he. Shizuku-chan, I'll work hard!」

『My best friend's delusions won't stop… This prostrating person is strange. Sorry. I'm powerless.』

I hear Shizuku-chan's confession. She's strange today after all. It must be because I made her talk to me until this late and she's tired. I'm sorry, Shizuku-chan.

Since that day the boy whose name I don't know prostrated, 1 year has passed.

I got involved in Kouki-kun's riots as usual, and he got involved in mine… anyway, a lot happened in my last year of junior high school.

I lay in wait for him, wandered, laid in wait, wandered… I wasn't able to meet him after all.

I don’t know why I’m so anxious, but to think that time was the first and last time I’d ever meet him, my chest gets tight.

Really, I regret not calling him to a stop at that time. At least, I wish I had a photo. I’m an idiot.

Shizuku-chan always accompanies me to my ambushes. 「I can’t leave Kaori in maiden charge mode alone,」 she says as she looks in the distance. I’m quiet and listened to her advice saying not to tell Kouki-kun because it would be troublesome; this search is a secret for only Shizuku-chan and me.

I searched for him in secret for a whole year, and a new spring came.

I became a high school student. Today is the day of the entrance ceremony.

The cherry blossoms are in full bloom. The heart-shaped pink petals dance in the wind, it’s really pretty. Even if it’s the start of a new student life, I’m a bit lonely from the search but also filled with expectations.

「Kaori, what are you doing? We need to go to the gym, the ceremony is starting soon, right?」

「Shizuku-chan. E he he, I was looking at the cherry blossoms. It makes me feel light somehow.」

「Fu fu, I understand. I feel the same.」

Shizuku- chan is lined up next to me, also looking at the cherry tree. The wind is blowing, and Shizuku-chan's beautiful trademark ponytail is fluttering about. Her long and narrow eyes are loose as she pushes her hair behind her ear, it's very adult somehow. High school from junior high school, nothing changed much, but the best friend I can boast of seems to have become an adult.

「… Pretty.」

I say it on reflex. 「Right, they really are pretty.」 Shizuku-chan also agrees as she looks up. Shizuku-chan doesn't seem aware of it though.

「That's not it. Shizuku-chan is. Like a goddess staring at the cherry blossoms.」

「W, what are you suddenly saying?」

Shizuku-chan looks away, but her ears are red. Really shy. Right, so cute.

But I'm worried. Such a cute and pretty Shizuku-chan, but I haven't heard "that kind of story" yet. Because she's known Kouki-kun for longer than I have, maybe she has those feelings? Though I thought so before, it seems not to be the case…

We're in high school now, so it would really be bad if the serious Shizuku-chan who is really adult-like is deceived by a bad man. As her close friend, I need to admonish this Shizuku-chan with no awareness.

「Listen, okay, Shizuku-chan. Listen to me carefully.」

「Kaori, what's with that character?」

「Hey, I'm being serious! Shizuku-chan, you know, you're really cute. And you're a beautiful woman. Boys won't leave you alone. But my dad said all boys are wolves. So make sure not to be cheated by wolves. Shizuku-chan, you should be aware of how cute you are. Understand? You need to properly look out for boys who approach you.」

「… Kaori, do you know what a boomerang is?」 Shizuku-chan brought up a strange topic.

「The thing that returns when you throw it, right?」

「Right. Those words you just said. They're very much like a boomerang.」

Why is Shizuku-chan looking at me with such warm eyes? Shizuku-chan begins looking around, and I do the same. Lots of new students are around us, lots of seniors, too. There's a lot of boys here. But they look away whenever I look at them.

「What did I say? It's already happening, you're always so defenseless. You need to be more aware, Shizuku-chan.」

Shizuku-chan squeezes my cheeks. 「Iff hurfs, Shihugu-jan. Shtoh ih～」

「Honestly, these cheeks of yours. If you think about the time, they're going to the gym.」

Shizuku-chan plays with my face until Ryuutarou-kun came and saved me from her devilish hands.

- Though I heard it later, at that time, a lot of students had nosebleeds and needed to be carried to the nurse's office. But they all had mysterious smiles.

The entrance ceremony started. I was happily sitting with Shizuku-chan and Ryuutarou-kun who are in my class. Kouki-kun, as the first year representative, is on the platform.

「Is he okay? Kouki, he's a bit tense.」

「Yeah. But he has experience from middle-school, so he'll be fine.」

Hearing my small worry, Shizuku-chan and Ryuutarou-kun respond. Certainly, it's hard to imagine Kouki-kun being nervous. He's always confident and always genuinely invites others to join him. He was really popular with the girls before. He seems to shine in front of others, definitely cool.

The principle finishes his story, and Kouki finally goes to the platform. The gym seems to shake… the girls are shouting loudly.

「I, I expected it, but… it's still amazing.」

Shizuku-chan looks at the surroundings with a cramp in her cheek. I agree. It's like an idol concert. The girls calling Kouki-kun's name are a bit scary.

Kouki-kun smiles and waves, he's really sparkling.

Kouki-kun finishes his greeting; the girls are holding their hands in front of their chest, not missing a word. It feels like there's a dangerous new religion or something.

At that time, behind me, I hear some boy's voices behind me. 「This guy, he's seriously asleep… what is he doing?」

「Sleeping during the entrance ceremony, and there was that commotion a while ago, too… he's got some nerves.」

Apparently there's someone dozing off in this situation. I, I am a bit anxious so I turn around and see a schoolboy shaking another's shoulder. His gaze is wandering as he's apologizing with a silly laugh. The boy's eyes are moving round and round… so a person can move his eyes like that.

I feel a bit of admiration for him, but what about the boy who started this commotion? I turned my gaze to the boy in

question. And,

「!」

I could hear my heart pop.

Arms crossed, sitting deep on the chair, the boy's eyes are drooping.

「… It's him.」

My eyes are stuck on the boy who is asleep. This entire year, I've wanted to meet him again. Meet him, talk to him.

Ahh, my heart is annoying. It's beating loudly in my ears like a drum. Kouki-kun's voice is disappearing. The entire scene is white, only that person is in my sight. Sound is gone, the people are gone, in this quiet, white world, there's just me and that sleeping boy. Just the two of us.

「Kaori. Kaori! Hey!」「Fuwari!!」

My white world disappears and sound returns like static drifting away. Kouki-kun's speech ended. The girls are excited again. And Shizuku-chan is shaking my shoulder, so my vision is bouncing around.

「Hey, turn around! The teacher is staring! The boys behind you are starting to hold their noses.」

「Ah, y, yeah.」

I'm reluctant to, but I turn around. It looks like the boys behind me really are holding their noses… just like Shizuku-chan said. The teacher is glaring at me…

「What in the world is going on with you?」

I wait until the teacher's eyes are looking away before I respond to Shizuku-chan who seems anxious. My hand is on my chest and my voice is shaking; my heart sounds noisier than anything around me.

「Y, you know, it's him. Him. It's him, Shizuku-chan.」「Him? Eh… no way? Where is "he?" Where!?」

「Behind us… two rows back. The sleeping person.」Shizuku-chan turns around, I'm pretty sure the boy behind us has

a nosebleed.「Is she really interested in me!?」he says as he crosses his arms and tries to keep a calm expression. With a nosebleed. The boy next to him is looking at him pitifully.

Shizuku-chan finally sees "him."

「The one sleeping without budging an inch in all this noise, that's the "him" you're looking for?」

「Y, yeah. What do I do, Shizuku-chan? We're in the same class, aren't we? Ahh, what do I do, Shizuku-chan?」

My mind is a mess. The mini Kaori's in my mind are surely causing

a clamor and running about, holding their head with their hands. It's a miracle, isn't it? The person I couldn't find for an entire year will be with me starting tomorrow… This world is so tricky, but so

great!

A feeling is welling up inside me that I can't seem to grip at all; Shizuku-chan grips my arm and jerks me.

Ryuutarou-kun didn't hear what we said because we were quiet, but he seems suspicious. The surrounding people, the teacher as well, they're all looking at us.

But my mind is in Heaven right now.

Seeing me like this, Shizuku-chan smiles wryly and pats my head to calm me down.

「That's great, isn't it, Kaori? All you need to do is go out, I mean, become friends with him. You have 3 years, so talk to him as much as you want, spend time with him, make a lot of memories, and selfishly be happy.」

The storm in my mind settles down hearing Shizuku-chan's gentle words.

And I imagine it.

Going to school with him in the morning. What did he eat for breakfast? Did he finish his homework? Talking nonsensically while walking in the chilly morning air. He seems calm, so I don't think his clothes or hair would be in disorder. I'll have to check.

When school starts, we can rest together and eat meals together, and maybe I'll make them… After school, we'll wander around town, that might be good. If it's every day, going to a coffee shop will be light on my purse, ah, if we do that a lot, we might be mistaken as a couple.

Holiday, school, I can't wait.

Just imagining it, I feel happy. My high school life, these 3 years, they'll be wonderful, really wonderful.

Ah, but there's a problem…

「What do I do, Shizuku-chan! I don't know how to greet his parents!」

「What are you talking about!? Rather, what kind of delusion are you saying, no, I can tell, but how did it advance that far! Are you getting married or something? Are you 10 years ahead?

Ha, it can't be… no, no Kaori. You can't do that yet!」 Shizuku-chan starts saying strange things again.

「Shizuku-chan, I only want to know how to greet them so they

don't dislike me when I visit as a friend…」

「!?」

「Sh, Shizuku-chan's!」

「!?」

Ah, Shizuku-chan is balling up on the chair. Her ears are red. Ah, she's wrapping her ponytail around her face. Ah, that kinda looks comfortable.

「… You two, what have you been whispering about, seriously? 」
Ryuutarou-kun calls out to us in amazement. Looking around, I

can see the teacher with a "good smile."

- It seems my high school life will start with a scolding from the teacher.

A little over 1 year.

I, I spent a lot of time with him — Nagumo Hajime-kun.

But it's really different from what I imagined. Hajime-kun, he's a so-called otaku; he spends a lot of time playing games at home rather than with people. We didn't spend much time alone together.

He comes in at the very limit sleepily, soon enters the world of dreams, and after school, he runs off like a fish jumping back into water.

In other words, even if I waited for him at his school before, he always returned by the time I got there after school ended.

Still, if I have a chance, I'll keep charging, even if it's only for harmless conversations… It might not be right to call him a close classmate now, let alone a friend.

Because when Hajime-kun talks to me, his face cramps up… his

eyes swim… and I think he tries to end the conversations quickly… When he talks to me, he keeps looking at everyone else.

「Nagumo-kun doesn't seem to care about me…」

「Those are words which would cause the boys of the world to cry bitter tears if they heard them.」

I went to consult Shizuku-chan, and that was her response. 「I can't believe there's a boy who doesn't falter to Kaori's approach,」 she said. Her expression is dazzling. I admire her in many ways.

「Rather, you should become an otaku as well, Kaori.」 That was her advice.

The next day, I charged toward a certain well-known store so I could start a conversation with Hajime-kun.

… As a result, I didn't understand anything.

There's too much, I can't learn it all. But if I were to give my impression, the illustration of the girl decorating the store… I think I can see her underwear. I don't know where to look.

I didn't look much though, so I can't be sure…

「Shizuku-chan, I charged forward, but… I, I think I should show Nagumo-kun my underwear.」

「Stop.」

Shizuku-chan presses against my cheek. I don't think I can do that. That's just for girls who get carried away by their passion.

「Usually you would ask to be taught about anime or games he's interested in and use that as a means to start a conversation, right?」

And like Shizuku-chan said, the next day, I went to Hajime-kun and asked about his hobbies.

Hajime-kun, he looked as if it was unexpected at first? Or confused? Or maybe he couldn't get his mind around it… he seemed suspicious. My mind seemed like it would break, but I was determined and learned a lot.

I was happy, so I began studying subculture. I think I know a bit now. Sorry Shizuku-chan, I kept bringing you along with me. By

mistake, she ended up going to the p, perverted game corner and waited for me. And while waiting, she b, browsed through them.

… It, it really was a mistake, there was no interest involved. A, anyway, I spent half my high school life learning more and

more about Hajime- kun, developing my future Shirasaki Kaori charge plans for the future, spending my days like this.

Then it happened.

My, our life greatly changed, and we fell to another world. Because of this, a cruel new daily life began.

I don’t think I wanted to talk much because we were summoned to another world.

Looking back on it, only regret crosses into my mind and my chest tightens. There’s magic. Everyone has a special talent. There’s a king, a princess, knights, it’s such a fairy tale. Honestly, I can’t deny that I had some fun.

But while everyone had a strong, useful talent, Hajime-kun alone was normal. The one who could support this depressed person was “me.” I can’t deny I had an ugly sense of superiority.

If I could somehow return to the past, I would pull myself aside and hit myself. With all my anger, I’d say 「It’s because you’re like this! Because you’re like this that Hajime-kun,」 and I’d beat myself until I woke up.

Surely, of the classmates, Hajime-kun was the only one to notice.

Despite not having a useful talent, he worked desperately. Everyone looked down on him. But only he noticed.

— In this world, how far are we from death?

While the entire class was taking things easy, only Nagumo-kun was seriously trying to “live.” No, I’m sure he was the only one who had the “resolution” to think of it.

I know. He’s that kind of person. I should have known as well.

Because that’s the reason I’m attracted to him.

At that time, despite being pale with fear, despite being in a cold sweat, he stepped forward to protect that old woman and the small boy.

I knew. I knew.

Death is near us in this world, and when it’s necessary, who will be the one to take the first step? Who will shoulder the most danger, even if he’s pale with fear and covered in sweat, the one who would never pull back if someone was still remaining behind?

Yet, I, though I should have known this, though I was “seriously trying to live,” I thought, “I’m sure we’ll be fine” without any basis…

And then I lost him.

It was the first time, the first time he had stretched his hand out as he disappeared into the darkness of the Abyss. The meaning of the word despair drove itself into my foolish head.

And the second time… when a miracle occurred and we were reunited. Beside him, drawing close to him naturally, with golden hair and eyes like garnets, there was a beautiful girl.

The first time, I could stand. Shizuku-chan supported me. Until I saw the reality with my eyes, I couldn't stop. With regret and anger, I stood up.

But the second time…

He appeared and killed a person without mercy.

Overwhelming confidence that she is loved by him, a firm ability suitable to the one who draws close to him, a strong will to fight against any who challenges her, and a beauty I can't help but think of as a foul.

Everything I had broke.

That's fine. What's done is done. I didn't really understand what was going on in my mind, I was only thrown into the situation. But without me doing anything, he was about to leave.

But, ironically, it was my natural enemy, the one who perfectly fit in the position I most desired, that woke me up.

Saying 「I overestimated you,」 「It was a pointless precaution,」 「Fu, you were never serious」 as she looked at me or, 「Take him if you can」 with that provocative gaze and 「I'll take all challengers… but not someone worthless」 while looking down at me! It's unbelievably frustrating! You're just trying to piss me off, aren't you! A disgusting woman like that, definitely not! I'll be the one to make Hajime-kun happy! Yeah, I will!

There's not just my natural enemy. There's that girl who adores him like a father, that rabbit-ear girl who's completely open with her affection, and that perverted older-sister-like woman, all of them have gathered around him. I hit my head to clear it since I'm not that smart.

That's why I noticed what I should notice.

That's why it's important to have conviction with my feelings. That's why — I'll charge at his heart.

I finally understand what it is that I've wanted to say these last 3 years. 「I like you.」

Hajime-kun. Prepare yourself. I'll never let you go.

Shirasaki Kaori, 17 years old. My special skill is "Charge."